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JANUARY

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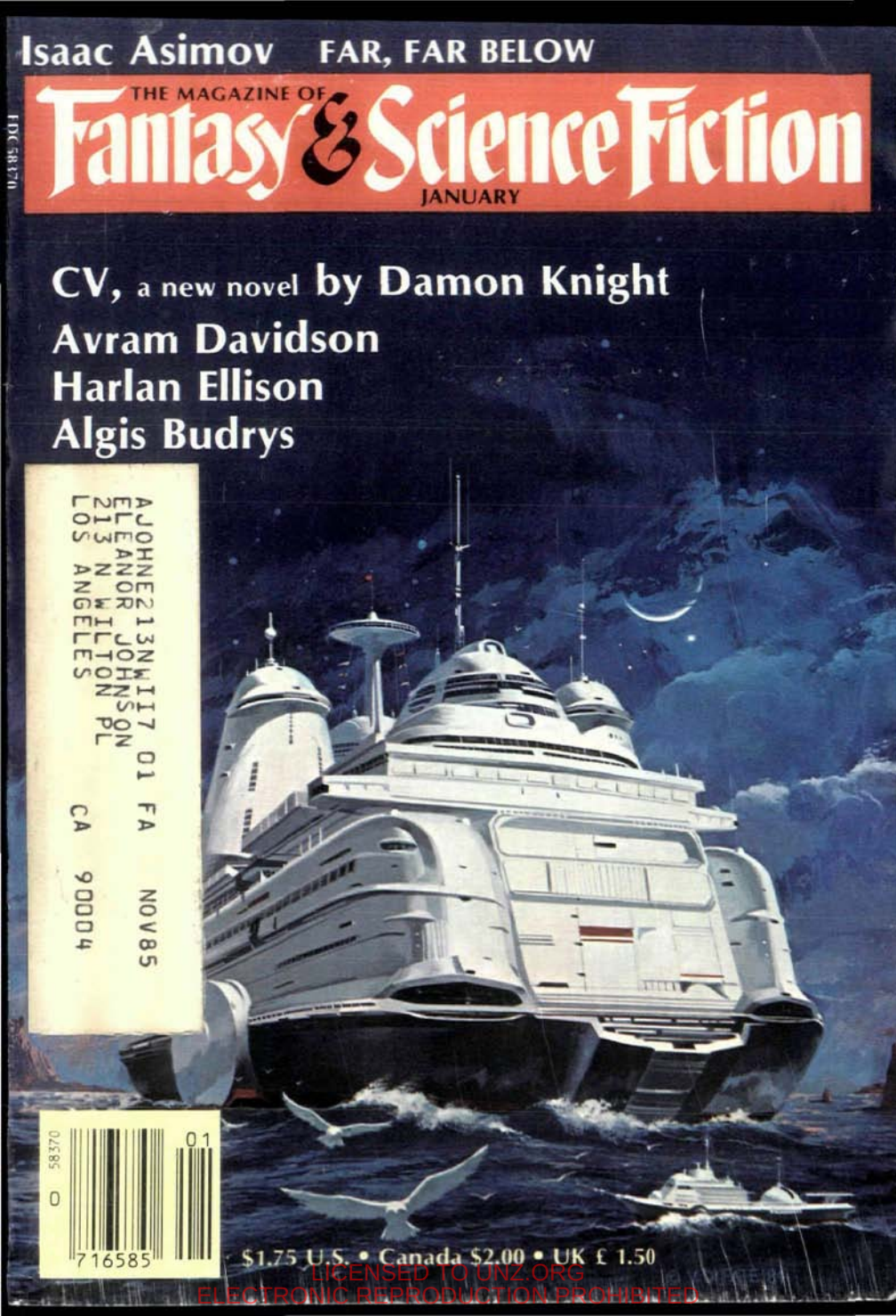

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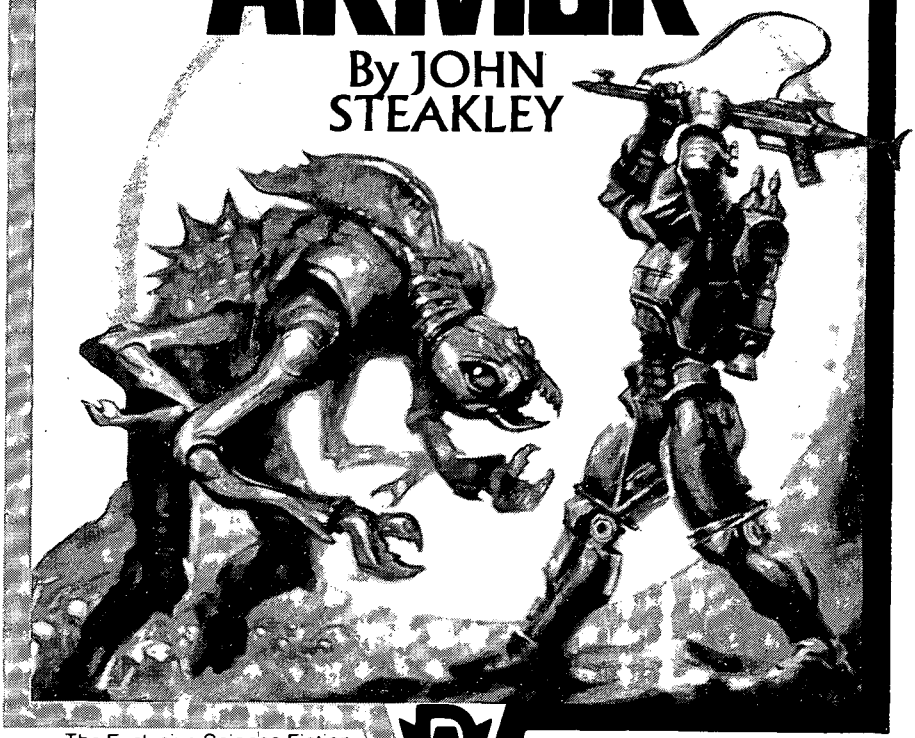

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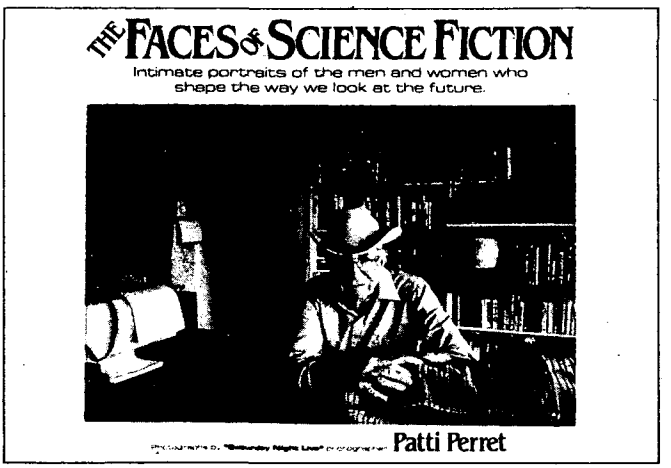

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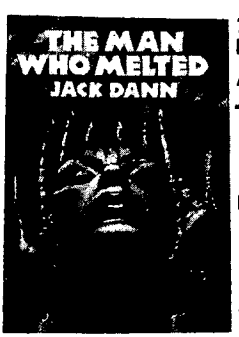

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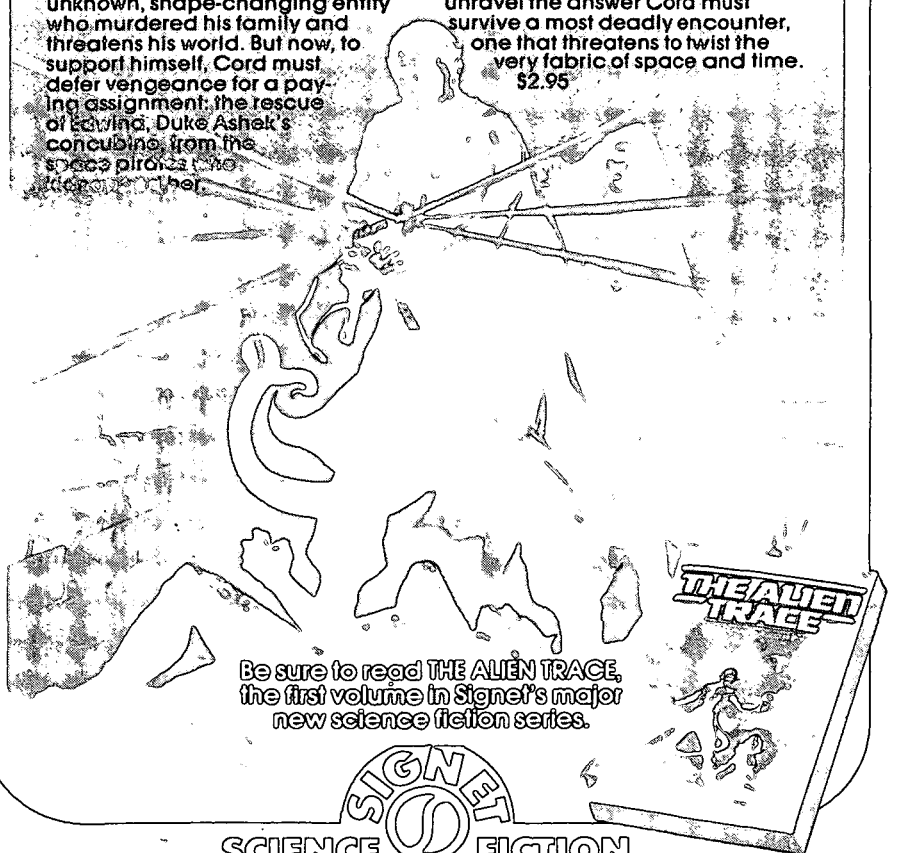

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Television has been called trash, and it has been called educational. Avram Davidson ("Dear Friend Charlene," with Grania Davis, August '84) here sees television as shaping people's lives. In "Revenge of the Cat-Lady" television talks — and one lady listens.

Revenge of the Cat-Lady

BY
AVRAM DAVIDSON

In a sad-smelling house on a weedy back street, Beulah Gurnsey sat watching a TV program. She was sitting in a sagging armchair whose upholstery had gone slick. Her face was sallow and its contours had long since slipped, and her eyes were large behind her eyeglasses. In the house next door three Oriental refugee children peered openmouthed from a window at the children of a darker and more abundant people playing in the street. These latter had not yet made up their minds about those former. They had long since made up their minds about Beulah Gurnsey, who nowadays tended not to go out very often. On the TV screen two women faced each other against the background of a house interior, to furnish which would have taken several years of Beulah's income. These women often spoke about their being poor, but not right now.

"I feel so *sorry* about Loretta," said one of them, right now. "It's such a shock for her, her daughter Kimberly not being able to graduate because of that terrible scandal, when, after all, she was only an innocent victim of Brett Brock's malice."

"Yes, I feel terribly sorry for her, too," said the other woman in the television. "And just when she was recovering from her—"

"Huh!" said Beulah Gurnsey. "You feel sorry for *her,* that brazen thing; what about *me*?"

The television lady with the frosted hair sort of wet her lips with the tip of her tongue, and said to the real-blonde television lady, "Uh, well, yes, what *about* Beulah Gurnsey?"

A sort of sarcastic smile on her face, the blonde one asked, "Well, what *about* her? *She's* nothing special.

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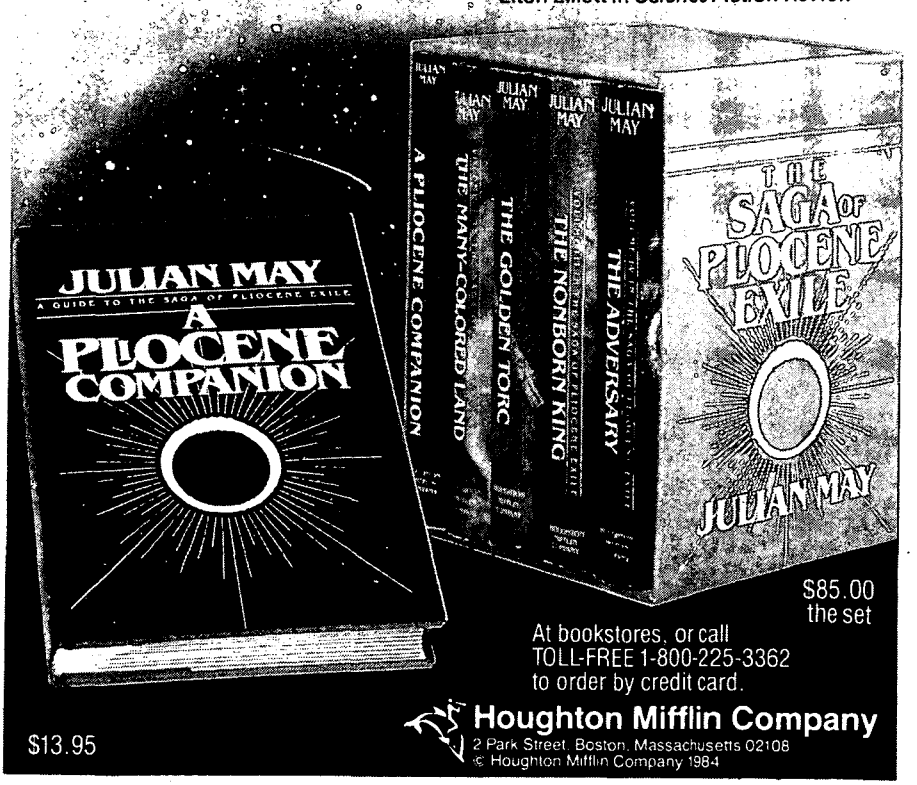

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Why is she any better than anyone else?"

In the kitchen the icebox made that funny sound that meant it was going to die again, and so Beulah would have to eat the lunch leftovers for supper or else they would be no good by tomorrow. "Oh, you rotten thing!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, well, *you* know," said the frosty-haired one, "she came from such a good family once upon a time and now look at the awful element moving into her neighborhood; besides which she hasn't got any money and she hasn't the first idea where to go look for any."

"Oh *no?*" —*such* sarcasm!

"No!" cried Beulah, striking the worn-through cloth on the arm of the chair. "No, she hasn't! So you just shut up—"

"And the few old-timers who are left around where she still lives, never coming to see her for years on end and looking at her house when they go by and talking about her and saying *you*-know-what ... and besides that, as I say, she hasn't got any money. Well, that's what it is to be poor, as well we know; let me give you some fresh tea in that nice bone china cup, dear. We can't afford anything better, because we're poor."

Blondie in the television let Frosty pour, but then she said, after a single sip, "Well, why doesn't she just go right down to J. Saul Sloane and ask *him* what *about* her late brother Clarence's bearer bonds that he has?"

Beulah Gurnsey stretched neck up straight and peered all around the room. "*I* don't know anything about any bearer bonds of my late brother Clarence's that J. Saul Sloane has!"

Frosty in the television put her head slightly to one side, said, "You see, she doesn't *know* anthing about that. Isn't the receipt for that inside the big paperweight on her late brother's desk? *She* doesn't know about that—"

Blondie smirked. Anyone could see what *she* was. "*Web*-ll," said she, with a toss of her head, "you can just bet that J. Saul *Sloane* knows about that. So—" But Beulah Gurnsey turned the set off before that one could say another word. Then she went into the closet and got out her ugliest black velvet hat and put it on with firm little jerks. Then she went into Clarence's bedroom, everything just as he had left it: there was the big paperweight on his desk. She pulled with her fingers, she pushed with her fingers — lo! part of the bottom came sliding out. Just like Clarence. *Who* always had to have the nicest lamb chop? Clarence! Beulah didn't exactly remember the last time she had had a lamb chop. There was the receipt. Secretive. Sly. Clarence.

She picked up the shopping bag with the neatly folded newspapers in it; *people* didn't have to think she didn't have a house to shop for.

Out she went.

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The two children on the street had already grown bored with trying to bait the three at the window; on seeing her, they slid simultaneously across her path, their faces gone rubbery but not quite blank. She leaned over toward them and opened her eyes wide as she could and crossed them and with a quick movement of her tongue slid her false uppers almost entirely out between her lips, then immediately slipped them in again. The children fled, mouths open to express a silent horror. "Don't you *dare* eat *my* cats!" she shouted at the suddenly empty window, shaking her fist. Beulah didn't exactly remember the last time she had had a cat.

J. Saul Sloane. Insurance. Real Estate. Usury. Unscrupulous Bilking of Widows, Orphans, and Legatees.

In she went.

That was a sight to see. Oh, that would have made your heart feel *good. Oh,* how he looked up when she just marched in as bold as you please. *She* knew about his filthy rotten low vile immoral life. His putty mouth opening in his putty face under his putty nose as he saw her just march in and wave that receipt so he could see it and recognize it, and *then* what did he say? *Ha!*

"Miss Beulah. Miss Beulah. I can explain. I was just keeping them for you. I—"

She said, "Hand them over. Ev-er-y-single-*one*-of-them, J. Saul Sloane." Which he did. And she gave him one look. Out of his safe. In the manila envelope. Did she think to check them to see if they were all of them there? Oh, you just bet. And left him his old paper and said not one word more.

Out she went.

County First National Bank and Trust Company.

"Now, Miss Gurnsey, we are really very sorry, but another extension would be out of the— Oh."

"Oh." *Ha!* Took the wind out of *his* sails!

Herman Heinrichs and Sons. Fine Meats. The young heinie, well, one of the young heinies, drew a sour face when he saw her. "No, I don't have any bones for your dog today," he said. Beulah Gurnsey didn't exactly remember the last time she had had a dog. A legal fiction; *never* mind.

Ignoring the young one, she turned to the old one, who was *there* today, for a change; "Heinie," she said, firmly, "I want six of your best, biggest, nice rib lamb chops, and don't you trim an ounce off them and don't you break a single bone: *you* know how I like them."

"Yes, Miss Kurnssey," he said, obediently. And after, he asked, "Shoult I but dem on your pill, Miss Kurnssey?"

Oh, how the young one yelped! "Grossdaddy, we don't *carry* any more bills," he cried.

Beulah paid him no mind. "*I.* Shall pay. *Cash. Thank* you, Heinie."

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Simmons Electrical. It always took Hi Simmons a week to stand up, he was so tall. "Beulah Gurnsey," said he, now, "that was a good enough and cheap enough used icebox when I sold it to you and I have worked many a miracle with it for you and for the old times in Old Granger Grammar School, but I am not Frankenstein and cannot hang it up in a tower in a lightning storm to revive it again; therefore—" He was all stood up.

"I want a nice new one."

"You can have a nice new one for $300."

"I want a nice new one for $500."

"You shall have it. Though there's got to be a catch."

"Yes. The catch is that the men who bring the new one take away the old one. *You* pay the dump fee. *Good*-bye, Hiram-firam."

Back home she simply sat in her chair awhile. A long while. Then she got up and unwrapped the lamb chops and she salted them and peppered them and garlic'd them and onioned them and thymed them and put them in the broiler and turned it on, and then she washed her hands. The fat would bubble and crisp and they would grow nice and brown on the outside and yet be pink and juicy on the inside and she would hold each one by its bone-handle and eat it while she watched television.

Speaking of *which*.

7:30 2 WHERE IT'S AT. Featured: *Treasure in Your Attic and Basement.*

8:00 13 MOVIE ★1/2 *Revenge of the Cat-Lady* (1953) Percy Wilkins, Velda Snow. An insane spinster terrorizes her neighborhood with the aid of a strange old family amulet. (2 hrs. 5 mins.)

Good, good. Those looked very good. Beulah Gurnsey sat back in her armchair.

What *was* the treasure in her attic and in her basement? Well, she would find out. The television would let her know.

And tomorrow she must certainly get a cat. ——

Cats.

She leaned forward and turned on the television.

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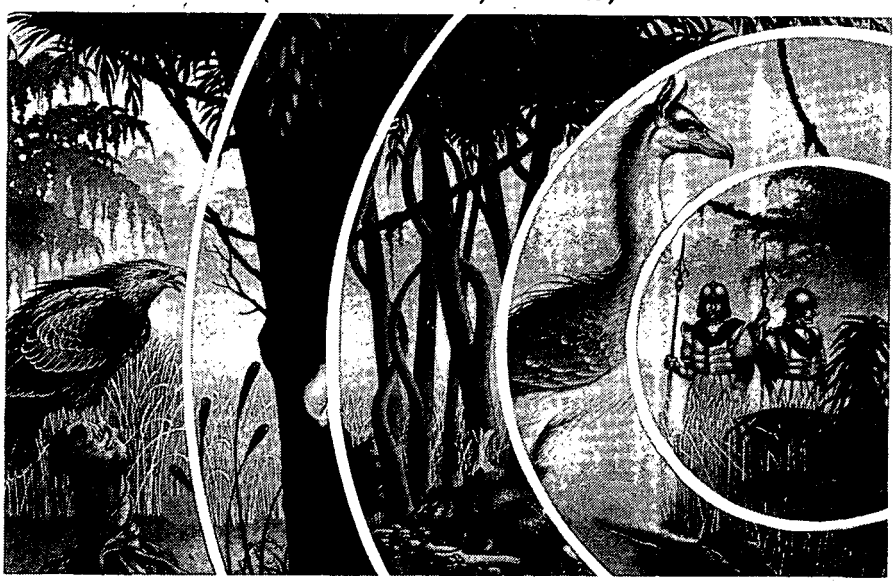

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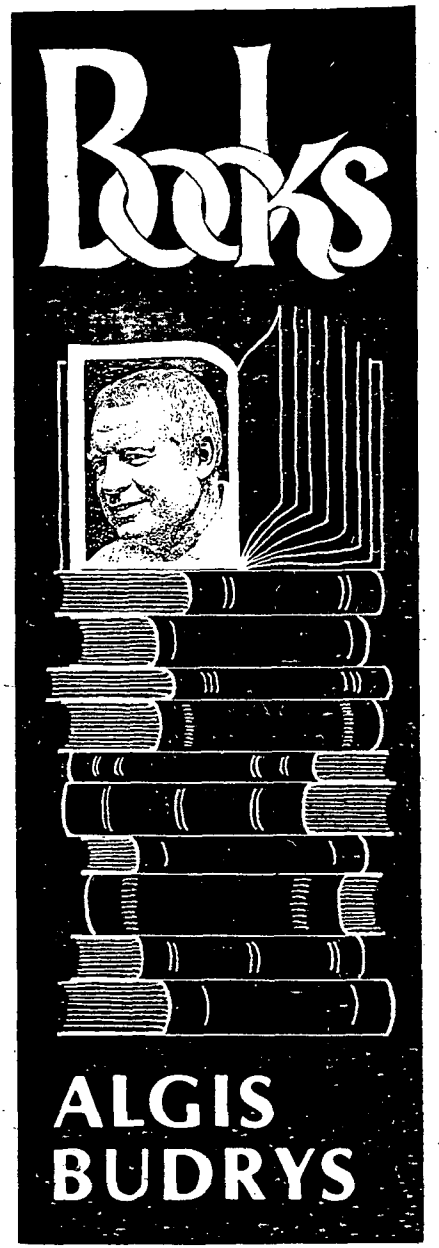

The Miracle, Irving Wallace, Dutton, $17.95

The Skook, JP Miller, Warner, $17.00

The Passion of Molly T., Lawrence Sanders, Putnam, $16.95

It's not as if it hasn't been going on noticeably for some time, and it's not as if some of us didn't expect it. But it just so happens that this time we have what appear to be three such books being published almost simultaneously, so the trend, if that's what it is, calls attention to itself.

In a somewhat indefinite but near future, Pope John Paul III declares Bernadette Subirous' journal entry genuine; in the middle 1800s, the Virgin did reliably tell Bernadette she would appear to someone in modern Lourdes in time for Irving Wallace to plant one of his international casts of characters on that gimcrack city of miracles.

Under New Jersey is a vast cavern; in that cavern is a great fossil sea, with coelacanths, plesiosaurs, and cave bears. In that cavern, too, comes a brush with the spiky, cantankerous thing that is human nobility. For a moment, something real is about to happen. But not in that cavern nor in that view of nobility is there a wonder strong enough to deter the cast from fleeing from safety into a John D. MacDonald pasteboard utopia.

In an indefinite but near future, a woman will be named the vice-presi-

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dential candidate of a major political party. As the chief of staff in a feminist terror-group, she has openly murdered her way onto the ballot, and seems likely to knock off the male president if they are elected, but the opposition makes no attempt to capitalize on this. Apparently this is because she is, after all, a woman, and the author assumed while writing this book that this would suffice to paralyze potential detractors.

The authors in question, besides Mr. Wallace, are JP Miller, who wrote the script for *Days of Wine and Roses,* and Lawrence T. Sanders, author of the *Deadly Sin* series, the *Tangent* series, the *Commandment* series, and of *The Tomorrow File,* a sort of lesser *Nineteen Eighty-Four* which a fair number of SF readers admire.

At least two of these books are surefire best-sellers even as I sit here before any of their publication dates. No Irving Wallace or Lawrence Sanders book can help it. Miller's *The Skook* — which I like best among the three — seems in my eyes to stand a far lesser chance. It doesn't have a bookselling byline on it, and it's really a quite different book from the (nominally) smooth product of its neighbors. In fact, how it relates best to the other two is that it possibly wouldn't have been published — certainly not as a Warner hardback, and certainly not with the sort of promotional investment it's gotten — if SF hadn't become almost as surefire a route to best-sellerdom as health books. This book, you can almost hear some marketing genius declare, not only has adultery, violence, and a motorcycle gang, but also some of that science-and-fiction stuff.

You may recall the long days when we in Sf yearned for acceptance by the big world, and then the days when we cheered the appearance of Sf best-sellers, betokening our having joined the Main Stream. Well, now we increasingly have something — something — joining us. What is it? Let us mull it over:

Wallace's adoption of outright SF trappings is apparently perfunctory; he futurizes his story only to the extent that it enables the "discovery" of Saint Bernadette's journal, and the public announcement of its startling entry.*

**For those who have never read Franz Werfel's novel about her,* The Song of Bernadette, *or seen the consequent Jennifer Jones film, Bernadette Subirous was a mid-nineteenth-century adolescent shepherd girl in the Pyrenees mountain region of southern France. At the grotto of Masabielle, in the town of Lourdes, the Virgin Mary appeared to her repeatedly, making various prophetic remarks and causing the opening of a miraculous spring. Thousands of pilgrims have claimed to be cured by the waters or by some contact with the Bernadette mystique. Well over fifty cures have been scrupulously authenticated as miraculous by the Roman Catholic church. Bernadette died, still young, in the 1870s and was canonized in 1933. As far as is known, she did not in fact leave the sort of journal attributed to her in* The Miracle.

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Except for that conceit, this is an utterly contemporary story — the trains are no faster, the elevators no better, the world's socioeconomic situation is exactly the same ... well, the French telephone system does seem a bit more reliable than it is at present reputed to be, to help Wallace's sub-plots hop around a little faster. There's no real extrapolation, in other words.

Nevertheless, this fleeting touch is a staggering one, and we might pause a moment to study that.

At first glance, for agnostics this book ought to be a fantasy and for believers it ought to be a piece of "realism" of the good old Irving Wallace sort. But a peculiar thing results from Wallace's approach to his subject. His payoff requires him to be perseveringly even-handed; he never quite outright declares that the Virgin ever appears to anyone or that she even appeared to Bernadette, and if he proposes that one of his characters enjoys a miraculous cure for an incurable condition, he also proposes that another does not, and allows as how the whole thing might be hysteria. In his accustomed way in catering to his audience, he fills the book with background; under the puerile story-lines is a reasonably palatable cram-course on the Bernadette story as legend and as fact. This, together with some competent travel-article prose, is successfully intended to spare the usual Wallace reader from ever having to actually go there and dig down deeper. (Tellingly, he pauses *en passant* to characterize Werfel's fiction as "inaccurate.") The paradoxical result of this reportorial circumstantiality is that the book can be read quite comfortably (except as literature) from the agnostic position. It is a piece of "realism," and the SF trappings are just a prudent disclaimer. Whereas from the believing position, we probably have something far less circumstantial here.

Far less. Bernadette's nonexistent journal entry certainly has not been released to the public. No world-wide super-pilgrimage to Lourdes is about to take place on the foretold week. The contemporary characters in the book — the Basque terrorist, the blind beauteous Italian actress, the Soviet premier-designate, the rapacious tourguide tart, the glamorous clinical psychologist and her moribund attorney/lover, the ugly but dogged female reporter for Amalgamated Press International, the famous Jewish surgeon, the smooth politician-priest and the disgruntled homely pastor — none of them exist. The miraculously cured stupid Englishwoman and her tinhorn promoter of a husband ... they don't exist, because the book is set in the future. Therefore, what Wallace has happening to them in relation to miraculous Lourdes is not "real," is it? It can have only a coincidential bearing on whatever truth or whatever faith is to be

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derived from the Bernadette story. That is, to a believer Wallace's book must be rank fantasy.

Either way, fantasy or realism, it eventually turns out to be remarkably poor; the ending consists of a series of very damp squibs indeed, intended no doubt to be a grand firework finale but wet down by major lacks of consistency in Wallace's own ground-rules, as well as by a sudden series of blatant lapses in verisimilitude. It may be that the usual Wallace reader doesn't care whether this is his usual recent level of performance. But in at least this example, Wallace couldn't carry the lunchbucket of any of the SF people who have in the past few years taken to grinding out product by the yard; if any of them ever take an interest in crossing over and competing with him, he's in serious trouble.

And, mind you, there are quite a few things he does well, nor is he stupid. He may not be able to imaginatively characterize a man fit to rule the Soviet Union, but he's done a very nice job on Lourdes and Bernadette; he's been there, it certainly seems, and driven the roads, walked the streets, eaten in the restaurants and quite possibly even bathed in the waters. He gives off a sense of the jet-set glamor-writer to whom all doors open easily and whose every peregrination through the demesnes of the top class is a tax-deductible research trip. But as soon as we have developed a few more SF writers on first-name terms with maitres d'hotel in Antibes, that sole advantage will be negated.

The Skook is an imaginary creature. It lives in the essence of purity, a sort of metaphysical aether, and in time of need it appears with blinding speed and slashingly avenges affronts to the pure. The Skook was invented by a man named Spanish Barrman as the protagonist of the bedtime stories he told his two daughters. At the time, he was a schoolteacher.

But time passed. Spanish is well into middle age now, fired for flagrant adultery, married to his promiscuous lover. His daughters hate him, he sells aluminum siding, and his only refuge is a regular solitary fishing trip to the banks of the Delaware River, where he sits under a secluded overhang, slugs down vodka, and hopes nothing bites. An evil-worshipping motorcycle gang selects him for human sacrifice. Trying to get at him, they blow up the riverbank, trapping him in an unsuspected cave which proves to be far larger and more various than anything you'd expect in that part of New Jersey or any other part.

Trapped — and declared legally dead — he survives only because The Skook appears to him, nagging, enigmatic and disputatious. It cannot help him with the cave bears, but it can rouse him at those times when he innocently or slyly declares he is going to sleep but is laying himself down to die.

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Months later he emerges, wasted, raddled, and incoherent, just in time to frustrate the avaricious schemes cooked up by his wife's ambitious lover. The lover prepares to murder him — the potential profit in having Spanish stay dead runs into seven figures — and this is the point at which *Robinson Crusoe* turns into a MacDonald pastiche, complete, eventually, with deadly peril on a cabin cruiser in the Gulf of Mexico, and then an idyll in Mexico for the virtuous victors..

Underneath all that, Miller has been steadfastly grappling with the problem of what virtue is, and how its presence may be detected without respect to behavior, virtuous or otherwise. The Skook — at first the same sort of iffy, is-it-real-or-is-it-the-mind thing as Bernadette's apparitions — turns to have been a solid, functional linch-pin of the scenario in Miller's mind, thereby making *The Skook* an indubitable fantasy novel. Regretably, Miller's fragmented, badly paced and often anticlimatic text makes it a poor novel containing a beautiful fantasy idea.

Perhaps it's this business of being essentially a screenwriter. The novel abounds with cute gimmicks and is written in an unsteady prose that wavers between blurted colloquial and "heightened" overplaying, as if Miller were talking through it for a producer.

When Alfred Bester does this for us in *The Demolished Man* or *The Stars My Destination,* this works very well because that style of presentation particularly suits a fast-paced action story about simply motivated people. But it breaks down as a communitive vehicle the instant the scenario touches on anything of fragile nuance as distinguished from bathos — the way it did in Bester's *Golem*[100] — and it breaks down that way for Miller, too, despite everything in him that's a poet.

Still, I think you could do a lot worse with your reading time. And for lagniappe, there's a laser-generated 3-D picture of The Skook on the book jacket, so at the very least you should pick up a copy and tilt it around under the light.

An interesting thought here is that such very good "mainstream" craftsmen as Richard Gehman and Joseph Whitehill have in their time written very interesting straight male-menopause novels and either have been unable to sell them at all or have had a very hard time getting attention paid to them. The big world doesn't want to tackle that subject, even though it offers an artist the tremendous scope of having his protagonist potentially re-evaluate all the emotional material accrued over all of adolescence and all the prime of his life. The only thing that has made this mode at all viable in the mass market has been a saving touch of SF — the *Topper* series comes to mind, and half the canon of

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James Thurber. So it has been part of us all along.

Lawrence Sanders has his own audience, like Richard Condon or novelist William F. Buckley, and for that audience it hardly matters whether a given book does or doesn't stray over into SF signatures. The signatures that count are the Sanders tone of voice, the stylishly decadent eroticism, and the "insider" circumstantiality of his cosmopolitan settings. Here again is the advantage some "straight" commercial novelists have over SF writers who are otherwise just as sapient and just as talented. And here again is an advantage that would evaporate as soon as enough of us took up the production of tour-guide novels. Even now, our experience at fake settings would blow most of the competition out of the water, if we only pretended to have been to Cannes, since the audience for that species of factoid by definition has no ability to check for verity as distinguished from verisimilitude, and its book reviewers never ask factual questions.

What Sanders nominally writes about here is the day when women finally won't take any more, and organize an effective, pitiless national terrorist underground. His narrative traces its evolution from its beginnings to the point where it must weed out its most flagrant ultras and consolidate into the main stream of American political life, not without retaining violence as a now-to-be-metered-out-sensibly option.

This is, you recognize, the classic course in all revolutions. It's notable that Sanders nowhere finds anything in a revolution based on gender that is different from horizontally socialized revolutions, despite the fact that what is being promulgated is not an overturning but a re-polarization. He thus completely fails to deal with the issue of gender-discrimination, using it simply as a modish overcoat for the same old story.

The same old story according to Sanders, of course, is that sex pervades everything, motivates catastrophic actions, and thus lures, betrays and destroys its victims. It seems logically very awkward for a writer with a love-hate attitude toward sex to portray the feminist struggle, and Sanders starts out badly and improves only slightly before writing an ending whose intendedly startling climactic thought is one the reader has had in mind since the beginning of that chapter....

In *The Passion of Molly T.*, Molly's lesbian lover is killed when a redneck drunk fires a shot that ricochets. Taking lessons from her Vietnam-vet brother-in-law, Molly learns to shoot, bomb, and recruit. She builds her army state by state — there is some mention of branches overseas, but Sanders plain fails to undertake much of anything about that — pre-empts

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all the existing feminist political parties, but unfortunately also takes up with her brother-in-law, to which her sister takes exception.

And so on. The cast of characters is quite long and recognizable — the mediocre male national politician with the dipsomaniacal wife full of commonsense guidance; the ambitious aide who shares the services of a male prostitute with the Phyllis Schlafly of the far left; the black Vietnam vet who male-bonds with the white Vietnam vet; the old feminist succombing to Alzheimer's disease; the sleazy private eye and his only slightly less oleaginous government contact. None of these are real people in any way; they are cardboard Lenins, Guevaras and Fred Hamptons, supported by inflatable gunsels with all orifices guaranteed functional. All the principal women are men in drag, and the principal men — even the butch ones — are wimps.

There's quite a bit of shooting and exploding, of course, which evokes a cheer or two in the same way that Smokey is clearly intended from first blush for the shafts of The Bandit, but of actual grapple with the ostensible problem — that is, of the stuff that SF is especially suited for — there is none. This is because Sanders lacks the capability or more likely the desire. Perhaps he lacks the desire because it would deleteriously startle his publisher. His publisher is, in another ultracorporate configuration, part of one of the larger SF-publishing combines, but Sanders, having been designated an author of popular thrillers in the Condon mode, was thus long ago established in that merchandising compartment, and naturally would be severely discouraged from exceeding the permissible limits of the hermetic box he belongs in.

Those limits normally do allow and encourage adopting surefire commercial trappings, but no cross-generic substance. I wonder if Sanders, who seems an intelligent person with a sensitive psyche, chafes at these artificial limits and is making repeated frustrated attempts to somehow break out into the Main Stream, where SF is.

How baffled he must feel!

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Chet Williamson wrote "Will the Real Sam Starburst..." (June 1984). His new story concerns a tricky bit of negotiation with the most ritualistic race in the universe.

A Matter of Sensitivity

BY
CHET WILLIAMSON

Fleet Commander Brio Comstock plopped his san-slippered feet disgustedly on the desk top and frowned at the commander of Quadrant AL-55, Vladislaw Allen. "Earth needs rigurite, Allen, and as long as the war between the Knarls and the Villios continues, Earth will receive no rigurite."

"I realize that, Commander, and it's not as if I haven't tried...."

"Tried? Pah!"

"But the situation, sir ... it's so sensitive."

"You are a *diplomatist,* Allen, supposed to be one of the best. What the hell do you think got you appointed commander of this quadrant, your red hair?"

Allen's hand started up to brush away the crimson lock that suddenly began to tickle his eyebrow, but stopped as he noticed Comstock's glare of disapproval. "I'm sorry, sir, but in this situation an unthinking move, an attempt one can only *hope* will work, could mean disaster. The Knarls and the Villios simply cannot be permitted to negotiate together. It would mean—"

"I *know* what it would mean," Comstock interrupted, "and I don't want to hear it again. At least not *just* me."

Allen's itching eyebrows raised in an unspoken question.

"I've brought someone with me from base control," Comstock continued, "someone who may succeed where you've failed. He knows little of the situation, and I'd like you to explain it to him now." The fleet commander pressed a button on the console. "Grimes," he barked, "send Dr. Gordon in here."

Allen's jaw dropped down, but he

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immediately regained enough control to judiciously snap it shut again. "Dr. Gordon?" he asked. "Dr. Stavros Gordon?"

Comstock grinned at Allen's poorly hidden reaction. "The one and only. *Somebody's* gotta kick some ass around here."

They both stood as the door whispered open and Stavros Gordon entered. It was the first time Allen had seen the man since twenty years before at the academy, when Gordon had been the guest speaker at commencement. He had been seventy then, but even now looked not a day over fifty. Allen marveled at how such a commanding aura could surround a man only five feet tall. It may have been the moustache. Black as space, it swept out from the nose in twin arcs, soared up almost to the crest of the pink cheeks, and zoomed down to end just above the line of the firm and jutting jaw. A bit theatrical, thought Allen, but undeniably effective.

The hirsuteness of the upper lip made up in part for the bareness of the scalp, which was circumnavigated by only a fine gray-brown halo a centimeter wide that ran from ear to ear, leaving a broad expanse of smoothly fleshed cranium. Gordon scorned toupees, Allen had heard, and would not even consider the easy and painless transplants that had made baldheaded men such a rarity. When a colleague once asked him why he had never refurred his pate, he growled, "Smothers the brain," and would say no more on the subject.

But today he seemed cheerier, even jovial as he crossed the room to shake hands with Allen. "Allen," he said in his soft yet compelling voice, "so good to meet you at last. I've heard good things about you, boy. Looking forward to a few chats on matters diplomatic, yes?"

All the hero worship of Allen's youth came back to him as he shook the older man's hand. He even forgave the appellation of "boy" addressed to his forty-three-year-old self. "I'd enjoy that, sir. And let me say how delighted *I* am to meet *you.* I certainly hope you can give us some help in this matter."

"Ah, yes, good. Let's get to it, then. I know only the bare bones of the situation, Allen, so why not start from the top? What is the crux of all this?"

But it was Comstock who answered. "Rigurite, Gordon. Earth needs it, the Knarls and the Villios are the only suppliers, and neither one can get it to us while they're at war."

Gordon's brow furrowed, sending an extensive network of deeply etched wrinkles across the bold expanse of forehead. "Rigurite," he said. "That's that elastic mineral they make children's balls out of, isn't it?"

"Hardly that, Gordon," answered Comstock. "Not balls for children,

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but for adults. The game is Rigaball, and it's taken Earth by storm for the past ten years. It's made the old obsession with football that flourished in the twenty-cee look like a mere pastime."

"Hmm. I remember now. I've heard as much, though I don't get back to Earth often. About four years ago, I touched down for a week, but spent it in a beach chair. The gulls didn't mention the game." His eyes narrowed. "So our interest in stopping this war rests solely on a silly game."

"It's not a silly game, sir," Allen piped up, "at least not to Earth control. It's become the opiate of the masses in a way. Take away Rigaball, and it's feared that riots will break out. For some people, Rigaball on the box is all they have."

"Can't we synthesize this rigurite?"

"No, sir. It's been tried, but it's the unpredictable way that rigurite balls move in an oxygen atmosphere that makes the play so appealing. It's just not possible to duplicate it."

"Isn't there enough to last for a while?"

"Four months only, and that's a lot of rigurite. Its chemical components break down in Earth's atmosphere in a period of fifteen minutes, or one quarter of a game. Figure four one-meter-diameter balls per game, one game per day played by every team on Earth...."

"And that includes small-town teams, academy teams, pro teams, semipro, midget, and minor leagues," added Comstock.

"Well," Allen sighed, "that's an awful lot of rigurite."

Gordon frowned. "Why don't people start *reading* again.... Oh, very well, the Earth needs rigurite. So why can't they get it?"

"There's only one place we know where rigurite is found," said Allen. "On asteroid belts revolving around the double-star system you saw on your way in. Each star has in its own system one habitable planet. One of the planets is occupied by the Knarls, the other by the Villios. The two have never come into contact simply because there was no desire to."

"But they contacted *us,* didn't they?"

"Well, *we* contacted each of *them* for exploratory purposes, and they wished to trade with us. The only thing they had was rigurite, which both races use for a building material. When the ore was brought to Earth, it was found that our atmosphere broke it down almost immediately, making it utterly worthless, until one bright fellow discovered the marvelous *bouncing* qualitites of the stuff. And thus, Rigaball was born. It was an immediate hit, and the demand increased until our trade stations bought all the rigurite the Knarls and Villios could supply us with."

"So how did the war start?"

Allen looked at Comstock, a slight-

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ly embarrassed expression on his face. "Go on," Comstock said, "it's stupid but it's the truth."

Allen sighed. "A breach of etiquette, Dr. Gordon. A Knarl vessel and a Villios ship were crossing each other in one of the space lanes, a thing that hardly ever occurs. The Knarl vessel speeded up to make way for the Villios ship, and the Villios pilot blasted it, killing seventeen Knarl crewman."

"Good Lord! Why?"

"Exactly what we wondered. It was reported to us by one of our scout ships that witnessed the thing. We immediately contacted the Villios to inquire after their reason for the attack, and were told that the Knarl ship had committed an unpardonable *rudeness* by going first. Seems that according to Villios tradition, the ship on the left has the right-of-way. The Knarl ship was on the right."

"So they blasted 'em. Just like that," said Comstock. "Helluva way to run a quadrant. Savages firing at each other...."

"But they're *not* savages, Commander," said Allen, "and therein lies the problem. The Villios have etiquette codes for *everything*. They are undoubtedly the politest race in the universe...."

"And the dumbest," added Comstock.

"That well may be, sir, but it's that same ritual etiquette that's making it so damned difficult to end this war."

"Did you tell the Knarls of the Villios' motive in destroying their ship?" asked Gordon.

"Yes, but by that time it was too late. A small and angry squadron of Knarl vessels was picking off lone Villios ships. They vaporized six of them before we even contacted them."

"And how does it stand now?"

"Awkwardly. A temporary truce exists, but no Knarl or Villios vessel will leave port for fear of treachery from the other side."

"Which means," boomed Comstock, "no rigurite, as only the Knarls or the Villios, according to spatial property laws, can mine their belt."

Gordon frowned, his twin moustaches wriggling precariously. "Can a peace be made?"

"The Knarls seemed forgiving enough," Allen said. "They seem to understand the importance of rituals to the Villos, as they're a ritualistic society themselves, though in a totally different way. I think that if we were able to bring representatives of the two races together, peace could be made easily enough."

"Then why haven't you done so?"

"Wellll ... it's sensitive, you see, Doctor. The Villios are a highly *sensitive* race."

"Sensitive to what?"

"Appearances, for one thing. They themselves are tremendously ethereal. They're humanoid in shape, but quite slender, ectomorphic really, and—"

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"Oh, for God's sake, show him the holos," barked Comstock.

Allen, chagrined, touched a panel on the wall, and a holo leaped forth on the table in front of Gordon.

The thing that impressed Gordon most was the structural perfection of the creature. The head and trunk were roughly the same size, the shape of each being a cylinder tapered at both ends. Four sinuous, snakelike arms branched out from the middle of the trunk, ending in small and dainty circles of tissue. From the bottom of the trunk, two legs protruded, each consisting of a tapered cylinder for the upper leg, another for the lower, and a third, much smaller, that functioned as a foot.

"The circles on the hands are dilating organs that they use as well as we do our fingers. They are also how the race reproduces," said Allen.

"Asexual?"

Allen nodded. "Spores — a very small number, as nearly all survive. As you see, the eyes are stalked, giving them full 360-degree vision. The small flaps on top of the head are for sound, the tiny hole dead center in the face is for smell, and their food intake is that small triangular flap beneath."

"Delicate creatures, aren't they?" said Comstock, as if he disapproved.

"They are indeed. A beautiful race."

Allen sighed, not for the last time. "*Too* beautiful. Beautiful enough that they'll have little to do with any creature or race that doesn't meet their high standard of aesthetics."

"Primitive, then?"

"In what way?"

"That they don't realize that other races can't help the way they look."

Allen shook his head. "Oh, no, they understand that, just as nineteen- and twenty-cee bigots knew that Afroids couldn't help being brown. But that doesn't matter. They are still highly prejudiced against any race that appears to them physically inferior."

"The little bastards barely tolerate *us,*" said Comstock, "so you can imagine how they'd feel toward their neighbors, the Knarls, if they ever saw one."

"I'm afraid I *can't* imagine that, Brio, as *I've* never seen one."

"Ah, sorry!" Allen quickly readjusted the holo. The white image of the Villios faded, and was replaced by what looked to Gordon like a pile of dirty laundry with legs.

"This," said Allen, "is a Knarl. It's unique in the universe in that it's the only intelligent life-form we know of whose sensory, reproductive, and excretory functions are clustered together in an area fifty centimeters square."

"But I can't see anything," said Gordon, "only it's ... what is that, an outer shell?"

"In a way. Its entire surface is covered with scent cilia over an extremely thick, tough skin. It exists un-

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der savage planetary conditions, so anything that could be harmed is locked within. Watch."

Allen turned another button, and the holo split nearly in two. It was, thought Gordon, as if an egg had said, "Ah." If the outside was unappetizing, the inside was absolutely nauseating. There were pinks and reds and greens in abundance, all overlaid by a light brown-yellow surface of slime.

"Tough to look at, isn't it?" asked Comstock.

Gordon nodded in agreement. "What *is* all that?" he asked.

"That's *everything*," Allen replied. "The largest pink cavity there is the food intake. The hole above it is a combined anus/urethra...."

"Brilliant planning," observed Gordon dryly.

"The two holes on either side are ear channels, the three constantly shifting organs are eyes, those ... protuberances are external sex organs, and that *stuff* covering all of it is a mucus secretion, highly rich in nutrients, that flows constantly."

"A well-oiled beastie, that," smiled Gordon.

"So you see," said Comstock, "the difficulties of bringing these two races to the bargaining table together."

"And the Villios don't have the foggiest of what the Knarls look like, eh?" Gordon asked.

"Not a notion," replied Allen. "In fact, they seem to assume that the Knarls must be like themselves in appearance, since they come from the same binary system."

"Hmm. Like a Swede would expect a Norwegian to look like himself, eh? And did you correct the Villios in their error?"

Allen shook his head. "Neither corrected nor confirmed. With the latter, I'd be found out a liar, while the former would have meant an end to negotiations before they'd even started."

"Then you think the Villios would have nothing to do with the Knarls?"

"That's correct ... with the possible exception of trying to exterminate them as quickly as possible."

"Why can't we act as middlemen, then? Negotiate a peace with each side without ever having them meet?"

Allen shook his head sadly. "Impossible. According to Villios custom, they must meet personally with their enemies. It's a tradition that started with the tribal wars they had among themselves centuries ago."

"What about the Knarls? Would they accept third-party negotiators?"

"They'd accept it. It's damned difficult to offend the Knarls."

Gordon templed his fingertips. "So what it boils down to is this: The only way to end the war is with face-to-face negotiations, and face-to-face negotiations mean a state of permanent war."

"That's about the size of it." Allen collapsed into a chair.

"We hope to hell you can get us

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out of this mess, Gordon," said Comstock.

"All for the sake of a silly game?"

"There's more to it than that," grumbled Comstock. "I don't have to remind you there are lives at stake here. Millions of Knarls and Villios could die if this war resumes."

"Oh, don't preach alienism to me, Brio. I've written four books on the subject. My duty's clear enough." He turned to Allen. "Tell me, what ideas have you come up with?"

"Miserable ones, I'm afraid, sir."

"Like?"

"Like having the meeting in a room where the lights go out just before the Knarls enter, or having some humans impersonate Knarls, or...."

"Or half a dozen other crackpot schemes that'd have the Federation of Worlds down on us faster than crap through a goose."

"Yes, Brio," smiled Gordon, "I'm afraid I have to agree with you. Deception in this situation could be dangerous. Unless foolproof." The old man sat quietly, one finger rubbing the end of a gay moustache. Finally, he spoke. "Have you any beer on board?"

"You mean grizto?" Comstock asked, referring to the synthetic brew stocked in depth on most stations.

"No, the real thing. Earth brew. Hops, barley, and all."

Comstock made a face. "My own stock. In my cabin."

"Excellent. Could you have three containers sent up here?"

Allen held up a hand. "None for me, thanks."

Gordon shook his head. "I meant three for me. And then I'd like to be left alone for a bit."

Comstock rose, a dark frown on his face. "I'll send 'em right up. Come on, Allen." As he passed through the panel, he turned back to Gordon and snarled, "Three beers better be worth a damned good solution, Stavros!"

Gordon waved his hand idly as Comstock's florid face disappeared behind the panel.

The beer came quickly. It was well chilled, and Gordon grinned as he watched the creamy white foam billow up toward the top of the glass. He took a deep draught, wiped flecks of foam from his moustache, and began to think.

Three containers later, he tapped the console button and asked Comstock and Allen to rejoin him. When the two men entered the chamber, they found Gordon's chair turned and reclined, so that he was looking out the port from a horizontal position.

"Good God," growled Comstock, "this place smells like a brewery."

"*In vino veritas,* Brio," replied Gordon languidly. "I find my mind functions better when relaxed."

"You've got an idea?" Allen asked.

"I do. Allen, I want you to set up a meeting between myself and whoever is in charge of the Villios."

"When?"

"Instanter. Rigaball waits for no

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man ... or alien."

"Very well, sir." He crossed to the console and began to speak sharply into it.

Comstock lowered himself into the chair next to Gordon's reclining form. "All right, Stavros, what's the game?"

"No, no, Brio. I never tell of my plans until they're successful. That way no one ever ever knows of my unsuccessful ones, and I maintain my dubious reputation for infallibility. Just me and the popes."

"Who?"

"Don't they teach you military folk ritual history?"

Allen looked up from the console. "The meeting's set, Dr. Gordon. Three hours from now. We'll shuttle you over to V-1. That's another Villios stipulation — all negotiations on their ground."

Comstock grimaced. "Unpleasant buggers...."

"Now, Brio," cooed Gordon, "we must try to understand their ways. Surely we can bend a bit."

"Dr. Gordon?" Allen's voice had grown suddenly small. "There is one thing you should know. As you no doubt noticed on the holo, the Villios are hairless."

"Yes. So?"

"Whenever we meet with them, we wear skullcaps to cover our hair, which they find repulsively unacceptable."

"No problem. A skull cap will easily cover the little fringe I have remaining."

"Yes, sir, but ... but your moustache, sir...."

Gordon's eyes narrowed to slits. "My moustache?"

The younger man's words came out in a rush. "They would be offended by it, horribly offended. So much so that they would refuse to meet with you."

"My moustache ... I'll cover it up! Wear a scarf around my face. Uh ... boils! I'll say I have boils!"

"I'm sorry, sir. The face must be uncovered so expressions can be read."

"As for boils," chuckled Comstock, "if we send someone with boils to negotiate, they'd declare war on *us*." Then he laughed. "Stavros, 'we must try to understand their ways. Surely we can bend a bit?' "

Gordon smoldered. Just when he was in danger of breaking into flames, he spoke in a voice that could have cut iron. "Allen, would you please have stores send up a lase-razor, and Commander Comstock, I am going to require two more containers of beer."

"What! But I've only got—"

"No beer, no meeting. No meeting, no peace. No peace, no rigurite. No rigurite ... the fate of Earth, Commander, depends upon two containers of beer."

Gordon got his beer. And a razor, delivered personally by Fleet Commander Comstock, who, upon press-

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ing the razor into Gordon's hands, said, "There, Doctor. Shall I have some lubri-glue sent up in case you wish to reattach the moustaches later?"

"Amusing, Brio. But I think I'll shave in the shuttle. No point in rushing things."

Gordon, Allen, and Comstock boarded the shuttle a short time later, and set down on V-1 a few scant minutes before the hour scheduled for the meeting. Gordon had still not touched his moustache. Comstock only grinned sardonically, while Allen kept glancing nervously at the proud hirsute ribbons, as if wondering why they had not yet dropped off of their own accord. Gordon, on the other hand, seemed deeply rapt in thought, and showed no sign of the inordinate amount of beer he had consumed. Finally, Comstock spoke.

"We're here, Doctor. Don't you think it's about time, eh?" And he twirled an imaginary mustachio like a villain in a melo revival.

Gordon only smiled gently. "Never fear, Brio. The Villios are going to *love* my moustache."

Both men's eyes gaped wildly. "But, sir," Allen said, "you don't realize...."

"I realize perfectly well, my boy. And now, if you'll both excuse me, there are a few aliens I must speak to."

So saying, he walked down the steps into a waiting Villios landcar, leaving Allen and Comstock opening and closing their mouths like beached fish.

"Good God!" said Allen finally. "They'll kill him! He'll never get away with it!"

Comstock shook his head. "I don't know. I learned a long time ago never to underestimate the self-confidence of Stavros Gordon. That old bastard. If he comes out of there with a peace and both moustaches, I'll give him all the Earth brew I've got."

"No offense meant, sir, but I hope you'll be drinking grizto for the next few months."

Exactly one hour later, the landcar pulled up to the shuttle, and Stavros Gordon stepped out, moustaches shimmering in the light breeze like De Bergerac's white plume. Without a word, he strode up the steps past Comstock and Allen and into the small shuttle lounge, where he collapsed with a sigh on a pressure-chaise.

Comstock was hot on his heels. "All right, you old shyster, no playing coy! You've got your bloody moustaches, but have you got a goddamn peace?"

The old man looked up languidly, twisting his right moustache end in a counterparody of Comstock's earlier gesture. "Have you ever known me to come back without one?"

"But ... but," stammered Alen, "but *how?*"

"Well, it occurred to me," said

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Gordon, "that the only way the Villios would negotiate through a third party would be if the alternative were totally unacceptable to them *without* offending them in some way."

"You've lost me already," said Comstock.

"God, the military. I simply mean that if the Villios were offended by those with whom they were negotiating, they would not seek a third party. They would instead fight to the last man to erase from their escutcheon the dishonor of being offended. So I had to come up with something that would not offend them, yet would make *them* request a third party to act as middleman. But how to find that something, that was the trick.

"Then it struck me that those who are most easily offended by a flaw are doubly horrified at finding that flaw in themselves. For example, the man who loathes execrable breath, finding that sin in himself after consuming garlic and onions, will take special care to keep to himself until his offense is cleansed by time. So, I reasoned, might it be with the Villios.

"I first explained to them that the Knarls were sorry about the whole absurd business, and that they wished to make peace as quickly as possible. When asked, as I knew I would be, why the Knarls did not present themselves in person to negotiate an end to hostilities, I simply told the Villios that I wanted to speak to them first, to spare both sides any unnecessary discomfort. Well, their eyestalks wavered a bit at that, let me tell you! The leader asked me if the Knarls were so offensive that we Earthians dared not have the Villios see them.

"Well, Brio, you have hardly ever seen me feign surprise, I daresay, but I am a true master at the craft. At the academy, I took many honors on the stage. Among my roles were Oepidus, Volpone, Polonius...."

"For God's sake, Stavros, get on with it!"

"Ah, yes, I digress. My apologies. Well, in response to the Villios' question, I responded in a way that would have made my old drama coach proud, rest his soul. 'No,' I replied, 'on the contrary. I was afraid that....' I paused, and it proved to be a perfect spot for it. They were overcome with surprise and curiosity. Then, as slowly and tactfully as possible, I described the ethereal physical beauty of the Knarls, a race that has nearly transcended corporality to exist as sentient thought, a living tapestry of cloud that totally disdains the physical."

Allen's eyes opened wide. "You lied!" he said, near to panic. "You lied to them, Dr. Gordon! That's against all Federation rules, that negates—"

"Easy, my boy," Gordon purred. "At no time did I specifically *state* any of what I've just told you. I merely suggested it. They, as I had intended, took my evasion for tact, for the desire not to offend them by

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overtly stating that the Knarls would puke their vaporous guts out at the mere sight of a Villios."

Comstock was smiling now, a great broad grin that split the florid face in two. "And they went for it?"

"Was there ever a doubt? They were so afraid of offending a physically superior race that they practically begged me to intercede. I, of course, agreed to do just that, and here," he tapped the dossier on his lap, "are the terms of a Villios peace — and very generous ones, I might add."

"Stavros, my beer is yours, and glad I am to give it up!"

"What do you mean?"

After Comstock had explained his sudden generosity, Gordon laughed and said, "We'll share it. I intend to get, as my grandfather was fond of saying, chicken-drunk and hog-wild."

"One more thing, Dr. Gordon," said Allen. "Your moustache. How did they respond to that facial hair? We were afraid they'd go wild."

Gordon beamed. "My dear boy, a well-waxed moustache looks no more like hair than does a metal antenna. And that's precisely what the Villios think they are."

"Antennae?"

"Mankind's next step up the evolutionary ladder. Sound-absorbing antennae to eventually replace these wretched, unsightly flaps we call ears. Oh, by the way, I suggest that from now on anyone meeting or trading with the Villios grows such appendages as mine. Wouldn't want them to think we're reverting to type, eh?"

And all the way back to the station, Quadrant Commander Allen stroked his bare upper lip, and gazed thoughtfully at his reflection in the port glass.

Coming soon

Next month: Stunning fantasy by Ian Watson, deep-space science fiction from Connie Willis, plus part 2 of Damon Knight's CV.

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David Wiltse is a versatile writer who has worked successfully in plays, TV and films and has published two novels (most recently THE SERPENT, Delacorte) and many magazine pieces. He is an editor of Tennis *Magazine, and his first F&SF story is an offbeat tale about a haunted golf course.*

Feeny's Trials

BY
DAVID WILTSE

The world had turned its back on Walter Feeny, and he felt the chill of indifference in his bones. There came first a series of small catastrophes, like pebbles showering down before the avalanche. Three-foot putts rimmed out, medium irons hit straight as a plumb line bounced perversely to the side, the sports section was missing from his Sunday newspaper. Feeny sensed with foreboding an acceleration in minor misfortunes, as if the ground he trod were shifting imperceptibly, but seismically, beneath his feet.

One day he lost his eight iron. Not just *an* eight iron. *The* eight iron, *Feeny's* eight, the club that had scored the famous Feeny hole in one on Farshore's treacherous thirteenth hole. (Treacherous, that is, to anyone not armed with Feeny's eight.) King Arthur would not have been more undone by the loss of Excalibur. Seeking the club, Feeny retraced his route on the course, walking it backward from the eighteenth, shot by shot, unraveling the round like a ball of twine. From first putt to edge of green, from chip to sand trap, from trap to approach — this unhappy trio of mishits being a measure of how his game had deserted him — from short iron to long iron to drive, swimming upstream through oncoming foursomes like a mournful salmon. Hoping at any moment to see someone wave the club at him, to hear a call from afar — not *Fore!* but *Eight!* —he moved with the growing desperation of a man whose credit cards have disappeared.

Through high grass, past unwanted shade of oaks, under the daunting curve of bunkers, and even — oddly, unfamiliarly — in the fairway, he re-

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traced his steps. A creature of the unplayable lie and the unlikely shot, Feeny was an ace at retrieving lost balls. Like a hound with nose asniff, Feeny could normally seek out the elusive Maxfli even in the most uninhabitable region. He found balls now, fetching them from under rocks, in the shallow water of the pond, their little white faces peering up from premature burial in the mud like occluded phases of the moon; he found them in ruts of cart tracks, on the edge of the parking lot, nestled like eggs in the nest of a sprinkler cavity — all the places Feeny had trekked during his round — and wondered anew at the profligate nature of their owners. Forsake a ball because it had gone slightly astray? A shepherd at heart, Feeny sought out his strays and loved them all the more for returning to the fold.

He did not, however, find the missing iron. A tall man with sagging shoulders, graying hair, eyes as brown as a liver spot and lugubrious as a Basset, he trudged, paunch first, toward the first tee. The last rays of the setting sun gasped then died unceremoniously, leaving without an afterglow. The course was dark and deserted, and, Feeny realized with a sudden chill, frightening. He felt the eyes of some formless but malevolent being glaring at him. Looking toward the prospect that during the day was an inviting stretch of green, a home away from home, Feeny saw — or feared he saw — a vast shape twist itself erect in the shadows, growing to meet the black sky, dark on dark. It towered over Feeny, its base anchored somewhere in the murky waters of the pond on five, its upper reaches stabbing out of sight, the inverted cone of a cyclone, touching down to wreak havoc. Feeny recognized it as the Spirit of the Course —and it did not care for Walter Feeny. He felt the Spirit glowering at him as he hurried toward his car. Pulling away, he heard the barking laugh of a hyena. Not a common sound in Connecticut.

When he got home, his truelove informed him that the dog had attacked the postman. Old Blue had missed the man but succeeded in getting a mouthful of moving car wheel. The tire, it seemed, was a good deal more durable than Blue's teeth, and Feeny was going to have to pay for a visit to a specialist in veterinary dentistry. Feeny had not known there was such a profession.

"In my day," he told his truelove, "dogs didn't have dentists."

"It is no longer your day," she said.

"It certainly isn't. I lost my eight iron," he said, trying to face the tragedy with courage.

"Buy another," she said, with the logic that golfers disdain.

"There is no other like it. This was *the* eight iron."

"*I* see."

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His truelove smiled a smile that chilled the blood, a look of such complete understanding that Feeny wanted to hide his head. She did it with rigid lips, nostrils flared a fraction as if catching a whiff of something she was too polite to mention, and an inclination of the head, a quarter inch perhaps. Feeny longed for compassion and commiseration, but instead he received understanding. It seemed a hard exchange.

"Also, the course is haunted," he blurted.

"Um," she said. She seemed pleased for him.

Feeny wondered if Mrs. Nicklaus would respond this way. An exact contemporary of Jack's, Feeny had followed the career of the master in a proprietary way, as if both of them had been formed by the same forces, two peas from the same astrological pod. Nurture had made the difference, Feeny often felt. Jack's talents had been appreciated and cultivated while Feeny had fallen on fallow ground, a youth misspent on basketball and acne, neither of which served to groove a proper swing. And then Jack had found a sympathetic mate. Yet another reason why Jack was already immortal and Feeny still sliced like a banana split.

Matters deteriorated. After years of unremitting struggle that had finally brought his game under the one hundred mark, his scores now threatened to slop back over the century level like the backwash of a stopped-up drain.

On Sunday he hit his drive into the midst of a flock of geese browsing in the middle of the fairway. When he got there, his ball was gone, vanished amid a sprinkling of down. Eaten by a goose! Waler was sure of it, there was no other explanation. His ball had to be in the gullet of one of the birds waddling away from him now with casual arrogance, but Ripken — Ripken the infamous, Ripken the archrival, Ripken whose handicap remained an elusive two strokes lower than Feeny's — Ripken judged the ball was lost and a penalty was due. Flustered and enraged, Feeny shot a 107.

On Wednesday he learned that his vice-presidency had been delayed. In a firm that had thirty-seven vp's, Feeny's was held up. Neither affirming nor denying, the Powers shuffled away from him in a fog of vagaries, skittering like crabs in a cloud of silt. Like an archaeologist constructing lost civilizations from a shard and a rusty halberd, Feeny was forced to fill in the pieces with his imagination. Already haunted by thoughts of Something Malignant, Feeny's imagination supplied him with dire meanings and imports.

It seemed to Walter that the worst had happened. With the disappearance of his eight and the delay of his promotion, there was nothing more the Malignant Force could wish upon him.... Oh, Walter Feeny, foolish Walter Feeny!

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On Saturday he hooked. Feeny could never remember having hooked in his life. He had started life as a slicer, got worse, got better, had it under control, slipped backwards, improved, etc. etc. At his best he hit a fade; at his worst, a banana — but through it all he was a slicer. His ball went to the right like everyone else's. He knew it, he understood it, he counted on it, he compensated for it. And now, suddenly, maliciously, a hook. Not a draw, not the kind of sideward meander that pros control, but a hook that jerked as abruptly leftward as a Marxist takeover.

He discovered there was no room in the golf course designer's heart for the hooker. The world was shut off from him, he from the world. Where with his slice he had played from under trees and over adjoining greens, now Feeny sought out his errant balls across the highway, alongside neighbors' swimming pools.

There seemed no farther to fall. His scores were so high he got nosebleeds. Ripken laughed openly, and the others adopted an embarrassed silence that was even harder to bear.

On Sunday, Feeny skulled his drives as if trying to decapitate them. The hook had been disastrous yet somehow — well, manly. Dribbling the ball was humiliating. He could feel the Spirit of the Course slavering just over his shoulder, and he crouched like a rabbit pursued by hounds, trying not to whimper.

As they approached the fifth tee, Feeny's spirits quailed. He smelled the water, that black, brutish pond, staring at him like a baleful eye. It was here, he remembered, that the Spec- the ground scarcely farther than he could kick them — and here skulked the water, that black, brutish pond, staring at him like a baleful eye. It was here, he remembered, that the Specter of the Course had loomed.

Ripken hit a three iron that looked like a trip wire. It screeched, complaining of abuse, toward the pond, never rising more than three feet above the ground. The ball hit in midpond and skimmed over the surface like an orange duck, struggling to take off. Plash, plash, plash with diminishing strength, and then one final leap, in defiance of the laws of physics, that was bigger than all the rest and propelled Ripken's shot safely onto dry ground.

"A typical Ripken shot," said one of the foursome.

"You must have hit a turtle," said the second.

"I played it that way," said Ripken, defiantly.

Feeny was silent. Was he the only one who had seen the spectral hand reach out of the depths and toss Ripken's ball the final feet to shore?

"You're up," said Ripken. His eyes twinkled with self-satisfaction. Had he, too, seen the watery forearm, the aqueous hand, the fingers like leaping silver fish? Feeny knew he would

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never admit it. Ripken took credit for every bit of good luck himself. He had no bad luck. Feeny had been trying to beat Ripken for years, but the difference in their scores seemed as fixed as elements in an atomic table, the distance between them as established and immutable as nuclei.

Ripken sneered at him now, safely on land, awaiting Feeny's effort. Feeny selected his five iron, a club nearly as fabled in the Feenian armory as the vanished eight. This was the club that — if it had not actually bridged the Hellespont — had certainly conquered the pond many a time.

Feeny addressed the ball. The pond addressed Feeny.

"Come to me," said the water.

"What? What's that?"

"No one said a word," said Ripken.

"Come to me," said the pond.

"What gives?" Feeny demanded. The others looked at him curiously. Feeny stared at the black water. The pond glared back in spiteful amusement; its one Cyclopean eye winked, a lewd and nasty thing to see.

"I'm playing around the pond," Feeny announced. He struck a nine iron to the left of the water, leaving himself an eight iron to the green with a reach of only a few feet over water. Except he did not have an eight iron.

Feeny elected to swing a hard nine.

"Come to me," said the pond.

Feeny skulled the shot like a Comanche. It hit the bank of the pond, striking a rock, and caromed up and backward in an exact reversal of Ripken's unlikely bounce. The ball fell into the middle of the pond, thirty yards behind Feeny.

"Yummm!" he heard the pond say, waters rippling like vulgarly smacking lips.

"What have I done?" Feeny cried, sinking to his knees. He was good to his mother. He was good to his truelove. He was good to his children. He had a regular annual checkup, flossed daily, paid most of his taxes.

"What did I do to deserve this?" he asked.

"You underclubbed," said Ripken.

Feeling victimized as Job, Feeny rolled and kicked his way through the round. He hobbled at last to the eighteenth, as sore and bruised as if he had been pummeled. Misfortune made him limp. Shanking his drive into the line of trees along the right side of the fairway in what had become a routinely inept showing, Feeny trudged into the shade and stumbled over something metallic. Reaching down in the high grass, he pulled forth, like a prospector at Sutter's Mill lifting nuggets from the stream bed, his missing eight iron. Sun glinted off the burnished shaft, dazzling him. He wrapped his fingers around the leather grip and felt the club shudder in his hands. It had missed him, too.

Feeny raised the club overhead and was about to exclaim his good

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fortune to all when he suddenly remembered how he had lost it. It was the week before his bad luck started, and Feeny had reached the last hole tied with Ripken. His ball had gone to this very spot, and Feeny had found it, nestled atop a tussock of grass, a beautiful lie — six inches out-of-bounds. Ripken's ball, hit with an identical stroke, had stopped six inches in-bounds, a taunting orange excrescence. Feeny had cursed the course, the bounces, the fickle nature of the game. Faced with victory over his archrival, Feeny had hit his next shot before Ripken arrived, not declaring his penalty. It had seemed at the time as if he were simply correcting some of the injustice in the universe. (Ripken had holed out from seventy yards to win the match anyway.)

Now, with a sense of revelation bordering on the religious, Feeny realized his transgression. Ripken had not seen him, but the Course had. Of course. It had demanded its penalty, and had begun by taking the eight iron from his bag.

Feeny fell to his knees beneath the oaks.

"I have offended you," he cried aloud. "And I am grievously sorry." He prostrated himself, groveling unashamedly.

A sudden gust of wind shook the oaks, and the branches lashed and groaned overhead.

"Arise," said the oaks. "Arise and play on."

Feeny found his ball lodged amid a tangle of roots. He was about to declare an unplayable lie when the Course spoke to him again in the voice of the trees.

"Swing," said the voice. "Strike the ball."

"But I'll never...."

"Strike the ball," the voice repeated, sounding a bit peevish and impatient. Feeny thought he recognized the tones of Hogan.

Feeny swung his eight iron into the mass of roots. It nicked the ball like a three-cushion shot, bouncing off wood and branch. The ball sailed clear, soaring up and up. Dumbfounded, Feeny watched it climb and race toward the hole. He had never hit such a shot in his waking life. The green was two hundred yards away, and the ball was going straight for it. It flew over the green, then dropped straight down as if pulled by a string, landed four feet beyond the hole, rolled backward and stopped three inches from the cup. Feeny realized that the Course could as easily have put the ball in the cup but did not wish to appear ostentatious.

Feeny emerged from under the trees looking like a prophet coming out of the desert. His eyes were wild, his hair matted with grass, and he seemed to have sprouted a four-day beard. He brandished the eight iron over his head like a staff.

"What happened in there?" they asked.

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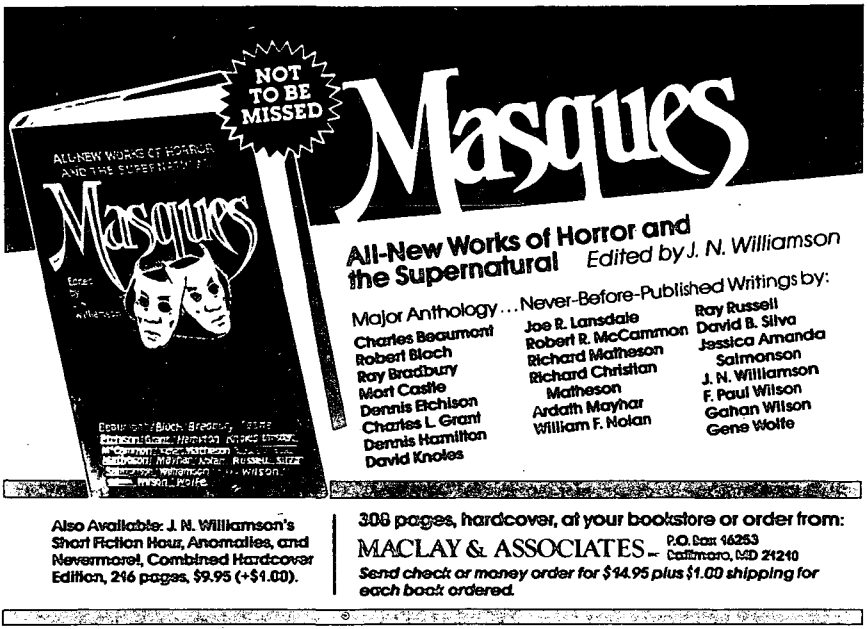
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Feeny looked at his friends. He started to tell them about the Spirit of the Course, about Sin and Redemption, about Scoring and the Rules of the Game. He started to tell them about the curse and how he had earned it and how it was now over; how he was cleansed by his trials and would cheat no more. He started to tell them, but then he stopped. Who would believe him?

"What happened?" they demanded again.

"I hit a pretty solid eight," he said.

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"I am Vice president for the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization," writes Kevin Anderson, "And I have had over 70 short stories, articles and reviews accepted for publication in many small press magazines." In his first appearance in F&SF, *Kevin Anderson tells of the "mysterious occurrences taking place on the night of the burning of Shakespeare's Globe Theater in London, 1613." "Final Performance" is a horrific little story demonstrating that some actors give more of themselves to the theater than perhaps they even realize.*

Final Performance

BY

KEVIN J. ANDERSON

London, this last day of June. 1613. No longer since than yesterday, while Burbages' Company were acting at the Globe the play of Henry VIII, and there shooting off certain (cannons) in way of triumph, the fire catched and fastened upon the thatch of the house, and there burned so furiously as it consumed the whole house, all in less than two hours, the people having enough to do to save themselves.

— Thomas Lorkins, eyewitness to the burning of the Globe Theatre

Setting — London. *Night. The charred ruins of the Globe Theatre. Little remains of Shakespeare's playhouse: skeletal, blackened beams, the stone foundations. It is late November 1613 — a light dusting of snow covers the ground.*

Enter Cuthbert Burbage, *half-owner of the Globe, brother of Richard Burbage, who is the famous actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare's company.*

Strange how silent London was so late at night. The houses surrounding him were dark, all candles extinguished for the night as sleeping townspeople huddled under deep piles of blankets. It was a cold November.

His breath congealed into thick plumes of steam as he walked, looking upward at the stars — intensely bright in the cold, crisp air. His left hand was kept warm by the rising heat of the lantern he carried, spilling out a small pool of dirty orange light on the snow ahead of him. The numb fingers of his right hand groped among the folds of his coat pocket, searching for warmth.

Burbage's cheeks were flushed,

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and his ears hummed in the silence; his belly felt warm and full from the several tankards of beer he had drunk at the inn. The loud voices and forced laughter still rang in his ears. But everything else was silent now: the night air with barely a breeze, the thin covering of snow that seemed to muffle his footsteps. He had so little to do now — and it would remain the same all winter — with only his trips to the inn, until spring. In spring he and Richard were going to rebuild.

His footsteps impressed black marks on the new snow in Maiden Lane, and he stood before the ruins of the Globe. Only a few charred beams stood upright, painted white with a thin coating of snow — like the skeletal remains of some mythical beast. It was dark, and he could see little by the light of his feeble lantern; a pile of burned timbers and blackened foundation stone blocked his view of the stage.

A sadness filled him — perhaps the beer made him more susceptible — but it was an eerie, powerful, almost tangible emotion. This, the greatest theater in London, which once had seated fifteen hundred people, now stood a pile of cinders and lonely ash.

No one had died in the fire, even though they had had a full house that last day. Well, one *had* died ... but not from the flames. Burbage had carefully covered that up: the brothers planned to rebuild the Globe, and superstition would drive people away from a playhouse where it was known a murder had been committed.

The external feeling of sadness strengthened, and waves of despair and pain buffeted him, seeming to emanate from the ruins, like the cries of a mortally wounded animal in its death throes. Burbage frowned: he hadn't realized how much beer he had drunk. Now, perhaps, he understood the way Richard felt every time he came near this place.

But then Richard had always been the sensitive one, the one so filled with passion. At times, Burbage envied his brother, who was so sure of himself always, totally devoted to his profession as an actor. Richard's one desire was to perform onstage, and he did such a tremendous job. He lived for the Globe — Shakespeare himself had written many parts specifically for him to portray. Cuthbert Burbage had also acted onstage, only occasionally; but to him it was nothing more than repeating lines he had memorized, picturing himself as a tool to move the play along. For Richard the characters were *real.*

It was not a hating envy he had for his brother, but a gentle one. Richard had no doubt as to his calling in life. The other Burbage was still waiting for his own calling. He had acted at times, when it was necessary; and he also managed the Globe Theatre, because his father had bequeathed it to Richard and him — and because he

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did a good job at it. His brother was a superb actor, and he himself was a shrewd businessman. The combination worked well: the previous success of the Globe had proved that.

But he wasn't sure that the loss of the Globe was the only reason for Richard's recent moody behavior, his anxiety. Being as popular as he was, Richard had little trouble acting in some of the other theaters in London. But Richard had seen something that night, when the Globe had burned, something that had shaken him badly. Burbage had waited for his brother to tell him, waited; but it had been five months, time enough for Richard's wound to heal ... or fester.

Perhaps things would be better come spring, when they could rebuild the theater. Smiling vaguely, he remembered when they had first built the Globe, fifteen years before. Their father had built his own playhouse, The Theatre, in 1576 — the first playhouse in all of London — in all of Europe, Burbage had heard (but who could possibly know all of Europe?). And on their father's death over twenty years later, The Theatre had passed on to Richard and Cuthbert Burbage — just as its lease ran out.

The landlord, one Giles Allen, was a singularly uncooperative man, despite Richard's impassioned speeches about an actor's need to have a playhouse in which to dissipate his creative energy; despite Cuthbert's tedious, patient negotiations. Allen had it in his mind to tear down the original playhouse because of "the greate and greevous abuses that grewe by The Theatre."

But the Burbages had turned the tables on him, tearing down The Theatre themselves and using the old wood, taking it to the south side of the Thames, where they had erected the new Globe Theatre. Burbage chuckled aloud as he remembered Giles Allen, his face splotchy, almost exploding with anger, cheated out of destroying the playhouse himself.

His low chuckle seemed alarmingly loud in the deep silence. Around him the snow seemed to muffle all other sound; even the wind had stopped. He tensed as his ears, numb from the cold, picked up a low sound, a strange sound. The thin blanket of snow had been left undisturbed since the last snowfall early the previous morning — only his own footprints left a trail to the ruins. He was the only one around — he had to be. The effects of the beer buzzed in his ears — perhaps they were playing tricks on him. He took another step into the ruins, stopping beside a blackened beam fallen at an odd angle. He rested his hand on the charred wood; melted snow ran along his fingers, carrying black particles of soot. He listened again, and he was sure. He looked at the snow around him — no one had entered the ruins in the past day.

Yet inside, unmistakably, he heard voices.

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SCENE II

On December 28, 1598, Richard and Cuthbert Burbage *"and divers other persons, to the number of twelve ... armed themselves ... and throwing down the sayd Theatre in verye outrageous, violent and riotous sort ... did then also in most forcible and ryotous manner take and carry away from thence all the Wood and timber thereof unto the Banckside ... and there erected a newe playhowse with the sayd timber and woode."*

— Giles Allen, in a lawsuit against the Burbages in Middlesex Court.

Setting — London. *The Globe Theatre, intact, before the burning. Morning. In the basement under the stage is* Thomas Radclyffe, *a young actor, rehearsing his lines, making sure he is satisfied with their delivery. He has been cast as Henry VIII in Shakespeare's new play, "All is True," which will be performed for the first time at Globe this afternoon.*
The basement is dim and shadowy, lit only by the light shining through the open trapdoor of the stage. It is cluttered with old props: a discarded mask of a ghost from an old play, costumes hung from sharp garment hooks on the wall beams.

Radclyffe closed his eyes tightly. He *was* Henry VIII. He filled his chest, thrusting it forward in a kinglike manner; he propped one hand on his hip. He imagined himself to be dressed in the garments King Henry wore in the portraits he had seen. His personality was putty, changing, fitting into a new mold, as an actor was required to do. He was almost ready.

His master, Havermont, had shown him this technique to *know* his characters, to *be* the people he was to portray. Radclyffe had been attached to Master Havermont almost seven years, lodging and boarding with the experienced actor since he had been ten years old. Thomas Radclyffe had been an extremely apt pupil — a bit impulsive, a bit impatient, his master had said, but Radclyffe wasn't sure now if the impressions he had given hadn't also been mostly an act.

After sending him through the typical women's roles — the bane of all apprentices before they started to sprout whiskers — Havermont had prepared him for the veteran actor's own particular types of parts so that Radclyffe could take his place at the time of his master's death.

And now Radclyffe had had the role of Henry VIII pressed upon him. Havermont had died suddenly; Radclyffe was not yet quite prepared, and perhaps he had let it go to his head a bit — his first salaried role, and it was *almost* the leading man. Radclyffe took it seriously — he always took his acting seriously — spending much of his free time down

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here, in the musty peacefulness of the basement of the Globe, where he could be totally alone, and let his dialogue fall into the quiet psyche of the theater.

The lines came into his head — he was ready for them. He took up where he had left off the day before, trying to set his mind in the same mood. King Henry has just been informed that the people are outraged over a new tax, levied by the evil Cardinal Wolsey — no, not "evil," not yet: the king still considers him a trusted friend — Wolsey, played by Richard Burbage, the *real* star of the play, the part written by Shakespeare especially for Burbage. But the audience would go from the play remembering *him*, Thomas Radclyffe, Henry VIII.

He lowered his voice, taking on a forgiving, almost condescending tone, placing himself into the reality of the play. He is a king, he told himself, about to remove a tax he considers unjust, a tax he has known nothing about, which Wolsey has placed upon the people but has just denied doing so. The king holds Wolsey as friend, and believes him.

" 'Things done well and with a care exempt themselves from fear; things done without example, in their issue are to be fear'd.' "

"*Louder.*" Radclyffe reacted instinctively, raising his voice.

" 'Have you a precedent of this commission? I believe, not any.' "

"*More regal — more pride! With rising anger!*"

" 'We must not—' " He paused, looking around the shadows of the basement, frowning. "Who is there? Who has spoken?"

"*With rising anger! What is the next line? 'We must not rend our subjects from their laws, and stick them in our will.' This must be spoken angrily — not in a condescending tone.*"

Radclyffe became distressed, looking around the cluttered, cobwebbed shadows of the Globe's basement, but saw no one. He listened to the voice, trying to pinpoint it — but it was a whisper, an echoing mélange of voices.

"Where are you?" then his eyes centered on something, propped up against the wall, a mask of a ghost, used once for the part of the ghost of Hamlet's father. He felt an eerie chill crawling in the skin of his back. "*What* are you?"

Radclyffe moved toward the mask slowly, afraid, but intrigued. "*A part of your profession. A muse? No, not quite so ... quaint. We ARE the Globe Theatre.*"

Radclyffe picked up the mask, his fingers trembling. He looked to see if anything hid behind it — nothing. The frozen, empty mouth of the mask continued to pour forth its words.

"*Thirty-seven years ago, James Burbage built The Theatre — the first playhouse in all of Europe. And then his sons Richard and Cuthbert Burbage tore it down and used the*

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same wood to build this, the Globe Theatre. Can you think that all those performances, year after year, all those actors pouring their souls into these walls, could have no effect on the wood of this place? A part of it remains here. We are the soul of this playhouse — and you shall perform as we direct you when you perform on our stage, in our walls."

"No!" Radclyffe cast the mask back to the ground. The eyeholes continued to stare back at him. Anger and pride sprang from his years of training. "I would be *no* actor if I did only as you tell me. My master Havermont has taught me to be a great performer. He has shown me that *I* am to interpret the characters as *I* choose; I am to say the lines as *I* decide. The acting must come wholly from *me*, or else I am just repeating words. Master Havermont is right, and I cannot listen to you."

He had never doubted the existence of ghosts — nobody in London did. But he knew that ghosts were probably evil — and probably dangerous.

The voice paused, taking on a more sinister tone. "*You hold your dead master in high esteem, then?*"

" 'The gentleman is learn'd, and a most rare speaker; to nature none more bound; his training such that he may furnish and instruct great teachers, and never seek for aid out of himself.' Indeed, I hold him in esteem."

"*Then do you not think a part of him abides with us?*" The voice was different now, familiar ... Havermont's voice.

"Be silent! I will believe that part of him abides with you — if you are truly the leavings of great actors — but it is a *bad* part, much like the scum on top of a beautiful pond. My master would never counsel me to listen to every whim of a spectator! I will speak *my* lines, with *my* voice, and *my* mind!"

Radclyffe turned, anger on his face, perhaps to cover his fear, and stormed toward the basement steps. Suddenly he was slammed against the wall by unseen hands and held there by a force he could not define. His eyes began to show fear. The voice came at him from every beam, every shadow.

"*We have more power here than you think! You would be safer if you did not resist!*"

Radclyffe used his anger again to push off the paralyzing fear. " 'Be advis'd; heat not a furnace for your foe so hot that it do singe yourself!' "

Radclyffe flailed his hands in the air as if to fend off the unseen enemy, and he broke away, running quickly up the stairs.

SCENE III

Yea, truly for I am persuaded that Satan hath not a more speedy way and fitter school to work and teach his desire to bring men and women

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into his snare than these ... plays and theatres are, and therefore necessary that these places and plays should be forbidden and dissolved and put down by authority.

—John Northbroke, a clergyman, *A Treatise against Dicing, Dancing and Interludes with other idle pastimes (1577)*

Setting — the uppermost floor of the Globe Theatre, just under the thatched roof. Raw beams cast odd shadows. Cuthbert Burbage *is loading gunpowder into one of three cannons, props, which he is preparing as a stage effect for the afternoon's first performance of "All is True." Enter* Thomas Radclyffe, *moving tentatively, looking nervous, a little shaken.*

Burbage kept his eye on the stream of black powder, pouring slowly so as to spill none of it. He heard the young actor approach. "One moment, Thomas...." he said aloud, and thought that from the corner of his eye he saw Radclyffe jump, startled. Burbage inspected his work and looked at the other two cannons for a moment, then turned to face Thomas Radclyffe.

The young actor fumbled with his words for a moment, and found it easiest to say, "What are those for?"

"They are cannons, Thomas! Stage effects! You know, in the first act, when you, King Henry, and your party enter Cardinal Wolsey's palace all cloaked and hidden? Well, when the king enters, we shall fire these cannons — armed with only paper wadding, of course — to let the *audience* know that the royal presence has just arrived — and also to give them a little start!"

Burbage smiled, rubbing his hands together, then looked at Radclyffe, dissolving his expression into a frown. The young actor was pale and gaunt, obviously frightened. "And where is the bold, proud young actor who drives us all nearly mad with his outbursts of eagerness?"

Radclyffe seemed to fumble for words; he found different ways for his fingers to interlock with each other. "Well, Mr. Burbage, sir, it is difficult to —"

"Speak!" Burbage snapped; not angrily, but with a tone of get-down-to-business that stopped all further stuttering from the young actor.

"Down in the basement — this theater — Mr. Burbage, there are *ghosts!*"

"Hissst!" Burbage turned him away, then looked worriedly down to the stage, where some of the other actors were rehearsing. None of them seemed to be paying any attention. "King's deathbed, man! Hush when you speak of such things! Ghosts? If that rumor were to be unleashed, it would ruin us as surely as if we were to burn the place down ourselves!"

Burbage shook his head, concerned, then looked hard at Radclyffe.

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"Now, these ghosts — you have seen them? Where?"

"In the basement — I didn't *see* them, but rather heard them."

Burbage let out an audible sigh of relief. "The basement! Thomas, any man can get the jitters when he's alone down there among all the old props and shadows. The wood creaks a little, a few rats rustle about here and there. And your imagination makes the rest —"

"No! It wasn't like that, Mr. Burbage! Not just odd sounds, but *words*! I had a conversation with the ghosts!"

"And what did these ghosts have to say?"

"They tried to force me to say my lines in different ways, making me act in their manner, and not my own. They tried to twist my talent, taking the ... the *life* out of my portrayal."

Burbage almost laughed, but contained himself. "Most ghosts try to murder people, Thomas — but your ghosts want to be your acting coaches!" He saw the expression on Radclyffe's face and became serious. "Maybe it's Havermont come back to help you?"

"No!" Radclyffe looked angry, upset, downcast. "You don't understand! They are *evil!* They try to twist my acting talent to their own ends! I cannot perform that way!"

The young actor stopped and changed his emotions abruptly, saddened, almost accusing. "You can't understand — you're not an actor. You don't know what it means to me." He drew in a deep breath. "You don't believe me."

Burbage didn't. But he had enough tact to pause a moment, considering the best way to handle the young actor. He reached up to put a hand on Radclyffe's shoulder. "I know you, Thomas. I know that your temper is a little short, and that you are inclined to act without thinking sometimes. But I have never known you to have a wild imagination, and I have never known you to lie. Seeing this change in your mood now, it is obvious to me that *you* believe what you say. But I ask you this, Thomas — say no word of this matter to anyone. If you must speak further on it, come to me, and only me. Surely you realize how this could ruin us if handled improperly. Any demon a man might find at the bottom of a bottle of ale would be seen as a ghost of the Globe — and people would flock away from this 'haunted theater' as if it were a plague house! No, we must keep silent about this."

"But the ghosts will still be here!"

Burbage sighed. "Thomas, what would you have me do? I cannot get two strong men and have the ghosts evicted as we would any other troublemakers!"

"Bring the bishop! Someone, anyone from the church! To exorcise the ghosts!"

Burbage widened his eyes almost in shock. "A priest? King's deathbed,

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Thomas! Do you spend no time out in the city, or are you always sheltered here in the theater? Have you not heard the Puritans' outcry against all places of amusement, theaters in particular? Did you not know that my father was forced to build the original Theatre outside the city of London because of the public outcry? And even then he was brought before the London lord mayor in the Middlesex Court more times than you can count on your hands. No priest would come near the Globe, unless he wanted to burn it down. The Puritans would like nothing more than to hear that Satan has haunted our playhouse."

Radclyffe seemed to hear, but not believe. He lowered his voice, almost glaring at Burbage. "You and your brother should never have used the old wood from The Theatre." Radclyffe's face was angry, and he turned to walk away.

"Thomas!" Burbage called, worried. The young actor didn't turn. "Don't do anything rash!"

Radclyffe didn't answer as he disappeared down the ladder leading from the loft. Burbage looked after him for a long moment, folding his lips into a troubled frown. Then he began to load gunpowder into the other two cannons.

SCENE IV

Things done well and with a care exempt themselves from fear.

— William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII,* first performed at the Globe Theater, June 29, 1613

Setting — the basement of the Globe Theatre. It is midafternoon on the day of the first performance of "All is True." Upstairs, offstage, noises can be heard as people file in to fill the theater. The play will begin soon. Enter Thomas Radclyffe, *afraid, but moving with determination. He carries a torch he has made, naked fire pouring light into the darkness.*

He paused, swallowing hard, forcing his mouth into a grim, determined line, holding the torch in front of him like a weapon. He filled his mind with anger and obsession. Martyr — like Buckingham in the play. If need be.

"Hear me, ghosts!" Radclyffe's voice trembled, then gained in strength. "You are evil! You are oppressive! You stifle the creative expression of all actors — I must destroy you to save my profession. 'Ye blew the fire that burns ye!' "

He picked up the mask from the floor. "What? Are you silent? Have you fled?"

Radclyffe dropped the mask and crushed it under his feet, finding a small, inadequate outlet for his anger and fear. He heard the people above, waiting for the play to begin. Someone would probably be looking for him.

"*You are brave, young actor —*

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are you not afraid?"

" 'Things done well and with a care exempt themselves from fear.' "

Radclyffe looked up to find the source of the voice — and saw another mask, a new one he hadn't seen before, propped in the corner of one of the beams, finely painted and detailed enough to look lifelike. Almost lifelike. It was Henry VIII, but subtly, hauntingly familiar, with definite traces of Radclyffe's own face embedded within the features.

The young actor shuddered briefly, then steeled himself. "I will burn this theater down and destroy the cursed wood you inhabit. You will not harm me — I have chosen this time with care — for if you do, you will expose yourselves to all of London!"

He waited for a reply, hearing only the crackle of his torch in the silence, until the voice spoke again.

"Ah, but you forget, young actor, that we ARE this theater ... and when we are filled with an audience —" Radclyffe's torch was suddenly snuffed out, plunging him into darkness. *"We are strongest of all!"*

And he felt a cold, icy grip, not quite like hands, around his throat....

SCENE V

Will not a filthy play with a blast of trumpet sooner call thither a thousand than an hour's tolling of bell bring to a sermon a hundred?

— A preacher, Stockton, in a sermon against The Theatre, 1578

Setting — the ground level of the Globe Theatre; the yard is filled with people, trying to get a clear view of the stage, which is raised above the crowd. At the entrance stands a placard announcing the day's play. Similar leaflets are scattered throughout London, tacked onto wooden posts, competing with many other announcements.

As the people file through the single, narrow entrance, a man stands with a small box in hand, collecting one penny from all who enter. Those who are content to stand continue into the yard; those who wish a seat or a private box are required to pay an extra sum.

Cuthbert Burbage *sits among others in a Twelvepenny Room, one of the best seats in the playhouse, with his guest,* Lady Dalton. *She is older than he, dressed in gaudy finery, decked with jewels. Burbage looks at the activity around him; he is impatient.*

"If they don't start soon, we won't finish the play before sunset," he muttered to himself. "Can't have a performance without daylight, you know."

"Cuthbert, this is so exciting!" Lady Dalton peered excitedly into the crowd, as if to find out which of her social acquaintances had failed to attend the play, and how many had

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failed to get seats as exquisite as her own.

Burbage looked at her, scowling slightly. Lady Dalton was rather rich ... and rather old, and rather dim. Damn his business sense.

"Is Shakespeare *himself* here today, Cuthbert?"

"Of course he is —" Burbage snapped. "You don't think he'd miss the first performance of his new play?" He caught himself, placing some sweetness into his voice. "There he is, just across the yard from us ... see, in one of the other Twelvepenny Rooms."

"Sooo!" she cooed.

Burbage looked around uncomfortably; he wondered if Radclyffe had been found yet. The play had to start soon — he was afraid the young actor was going to ruin his first important role by chasing after ghosts in his imagination. Radclyffe — don't be a fool!

The noise of the audience waned like a dying fire after one of the Lord Chamberlain's Men stepped out onto the stage, speaking the Prologue. People smothered their random sounds, focusing on the words being spoken, waiting to be taken away to another reality.

And the play began.

Burbage leaned back in his seat, relaxing slightly, or at least seeming to. They wouldn't have started the play without Radclyffe, even though he didn't make an appearance until the second scene.

Lady Dalton seemed to be more interested in the audience than in the play. Burbage watched his brother Richard perform, strutting around as Cardinal Wolsey in all his evil glory — Richard enjoyed the villain parts at times, but then Burbage could never tell what his brother really enjoyed and what was just an act.

(Wolsey accuses the innocent Buckingham, the martyr, of treason, and has him arrested, to be brought before the king's court.)

The first scene ended, and Burbage grew tense again. He sat up, waiting the unbearable few moments. Why was he uneasy? The performance was of prime importance — Radclyffe knew that — he imagined himself to be a devoted actor, and he would never miss his first important role.

The audience background noise rose up quickly for a few moments, but was dampened again as Scene II began. King Henry entered with pomp and glory — and Burbage finally felt at ease. After all, he should never have been worried. He knew Thomas Radclyffe — the young actor had been so proud of himself after receiving this part that he wouldn't have forfeited this performance for anything.

Yet, Burbage squinted — and thought he saw something strange about Radclyffe's face. Of course, the makeup would have changed it somewhat — but he thought he saw sharp edges, shadows, almost as if Radclyffe

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were wearing a very detailed mask ... but no, he could see the mouth move.

Still, he felt uneasy again. Lady Dalton probably couldn't even see that far.

"What's happening, Cuthbert?" she whispered.

Burbage almost imperceptibly rolled his eyes heavenward. "This is the trial of Buckingham at the king's court. Queen Katherine has just entered to beg the king to withdraw an unfair tax that takes one-sixth of every man's possessions —"

Lady Dalton seemed to be barely listening. "Who's Buckingham?"

Burbage sighed.

The scene progressed. Radclyffe's voice was the same, but Burbage seemed to notice some special quality, a lilt, an intonation, that made the young actor's voice stand out. Burbage had never considered himself a theatrical critic — he heard the lines, saw which ones were delivered more masterfully than others. And people paid to see the performance — he drew his livelihood from that. But he hadn't felt any special drive, any special presence about acting. Until now, in Radclyffe's voice, he felt the very embodiment of a performance, the life, the calling — yet he couldn't pin it down. He couldn't say why, but he was somehow aware that Radclyffe was giving the best performance he had ever seen.

Richard, though, seemed to be acting strangely. There — he had just stumbled over a line.. Richard had never stumbled over a line before, not in all Burbage's recollection. Was it jealousy? No, it was almost as if he were ... scared of something. But what would Richard ever be so afraid of that he couldn't successfully cover it up?

The scene continued; and Burbage felt a low buzz in the audience as the people remarked on how outstanding, how superb the young actor was. What would have seemed an almost interminably long scene any other time, now held them enthralled.

And at last the scene was over.

He felt a tap on his shoulder. Burbage was startled and turned to find the man next to him pointing out into the corridor where stood a young boy, one of the apprentice actors of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The boy looked agitated, pale and sweating. He seemed unable to speak, but gestured desperately for Burbage to come to him.

"Excuse me, Lady Dalton," he whispered in her ear. She smiled. "One of my actors wishes to speak with me."

"Oh, of course, Cuthbert — please hurry back."

Burbage went to the boy as the third scene began. They spoke in quiet voices. "What is it?"

The boy was trembling. "I've found him, Mr. Burbage!"

"What? *Who*?"

"Come! Quickly!" The boy took his

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arm and drew him down the corridor through the curtains behind the tiring-room, backstage, and to the narrow basement steps.

"What could possibly be down here, boy?"

"He is dead, sir! *Murdered!*"

"Who?"

"Thomas Radclyffe, sir! He's hung up on the wall, by his neck — on one of the clothes hooks!"

"You're *mad*, boy! He's just been—"

They entered the dimness of the basement, surrounded by the muffled echoes of the performance overhead. Burbage didn't need to look very closely to see a burned-out torch on the floor, and a shadowy figure hung on the wall with its feet dangling off the floor. And the face was that of Thomas Radclyffe.

"King's deathbed!" Burbage gaped a moment, realized what he was doing, then composed himself almost immediately, thinking fast. The boy stood next to him. Burbage made his face firm and expressionless, but he felt cold.

"This ... could ruin us. A murder! At the Globe Theatre!" He looked quickly at the boy. "You have told no one?"

"No, sir! I thought it wisest to speak only to you!"

"Good! You are intelligent, boy. I have a gold piece for you if you tell no one. Not one word. If you *do* speak of this, I will find it very easy to destroy your acting career for the rest of your life."

"Oh, not one word, sir. Please don't feel you need to use threats, Mr. Burbage."

"No ... no. I know. I have to think of what to do. Keep quiet and be *sure* no one else comes down here. Calm. I must be calm. *We* must remain calm." He sighed, "I'd best be back to Lady Dalton before she says anything. Until I can talk to Richard." He heaved a long breath, then muttered, "Oh, deathbeds for the entire royal family! How are we ever going to patch *this* up?"

They walked up the stairs. "But, Mr. Burbage — if Thomas Radclyffe is dead down here ... then *who* is on the stage?"

Burbage paused, gripping the rail. "I don't know ... and I am afraid to know."

He walked slowly back and seated himself beside Lady Dalton as Scene IV was just beginning. He gripped the arms of the chair to stop his hands from trembling. Burbage was surprised to find her watching the play.

She pointed to the action on the stage. "What are they having a party for, Cuthbert?"

Burbage tried to get his mind back on the play, to focus on something other than his cold fear. "Uh ... Cardinal Wolsey, my brother Richard, is having a great dinner at his palace, with many lords and ladies. See ... they're all sitting around having idle

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dinner conversation, until —" He waited: it would have been glee and childlike anticipation in other circumstances. Trumpets sounded; drums rolled; and the cannons blasted, thundering in his ears.

And as his ears rung, Burbage thought he heard Thomas Radclyffe's voice, somehow — the real voice, not the false acting voice on the stage: this was different, a whisper running through his head, though not intended for his own ears.

"*Now, we fight on equal terms.*"

Unseen, some of the burning paper wadding settled on the thatched roof, smoldering, kindling itself, setting fire to the roof.

Lady Dalton squealed in terror at the cannon sound, then in delight. The audience, half-deafened, murmured in confusion.

On the stage a company of cloaked and hooded strangers entered, hiding their faces. Burbage continued to explain. "The cardinal's guests think these are some foreign ambassadors — but they are really the king and his party in disguise. There ... that one is the king." Or is it something that I will never understand? — he thought to himself. There are more things in heaven and earth, Cuthbert Burbage, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

"How do you know that's the king?" Lady Dalton asked.

"From the *cannons* — we wouldn't blast cannons for anyone but the royal presence, now would we?"

"Oh."

They watched as the hooded company made its slow procession across the stage.

"There, now Cardinal Wolsey suspects that one of the maskers is the king ... he says as much ... and he decides to unmask him...."

Burbage watched his brother walk on the stage toward one of the hooded figures, reaching up tentatively — more tentative than he actually should have been. He gripped the folds of the hood and began to draw it back.

"FIRE!" someone shouted.

Suddenly all hands were pointed toward the thatched roof, which was in flames. Others took up the cry; tumult erupted. People fled toward the single narrow entrance.

On the stage, Richard Burbage cried out wildly; his face was white as a sculpture. The hooded figure was gone, the false Thomas Radclyffe, vanished. Unnoticed in the uproar.

And flames began to devour the Globe.

... some of the Paper or other stuff wherewith (the cannons) were stopped, did light on the Thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoak, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole House to the very ground ... yet nothing did perish but Wood and straw and a few forsaken cloakes. Only one

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man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broyled him if he had not by the benefit of provident will put it out with bottle ale.

— Sir Henry Wotton, eyewitness to the burning of the Globe Theater

... while Burbages' Company were acting at the Globe the play of Henry VIII, and there shooting off certain (cannons) in way of triumph, the fire catched and fastened upon the thatch of the house, and there burned so furiously, as it consumed the whole house, all in less than two hours, the people having enough to do to save themselves.

— Thomas Lorkins, eyewitness to the burning of the Globe Theatre

Cuthbert Burbage found his brother Richard, much more shaken than he should have been from the fire, standing in the churning crowd around wreckage. Night was falling. A heavy beam collapsed in a shower of sparks.

Silently, together, they watched their Globe Theatre burn....

SCENE VI

— Epilogue —

Setting — London. *Darkness.* Cuthbert Burbage *has entered the cold, snow-covered wreckage. Voices.*

He listened, creeping closer — the voices were strange and scattered, speaking a pastiche of lines from old Shakespeare plays. They didn't sound like children's voices; in fact, they seemed to carry a great deal of emotion, sadness, loss.

He stepped around some fallen timbers and came in view of the burned-out remnants of the stage. In the shadows he saw strange figures, masked and costumed.

"What are you doing there? Who are you?" Burbage shouted, his anger rising before he had time to think. He expected them to scatter and run like frightened children, but instead the figures turned to look at him.

Burbage stepped out from behind the wreckage and moved toward them. "Where did you get those masks?" he demanded, trying to place a tone of angry command in his voice.

The central figure turned toward him; he wore an old mask of the ghost of Hamlet's father, smashed-in but painstakingly repaired, blackened a little in the fire. He spoke in a deep, eerie voice, like many voices all in one.

"We are *the Globe Theatre, and we are almost dead. Do not disturb our final performance."*

Burbage halted a moment, then stepped forward. "You are trespassing," he said coldly, standing directly before the figure, glaring at the mask. He saw nothing behind the eyeholes. Nothing.

They confronted each other in silence; and, unexpectedly, Burbage

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reached up to pull the mask off. And beheld the face of a leering skull, desiccated and fire-blackened.

Before Burbage coud cry out, the mask was snatched away from his numb fingers and placed back on the figure's head.

Burbage felt cold, and his eyes misted over with terror and confusion. "*What* are you?" The words slid through his clenched teeth like a cold wind.

"A truly talented actor leaves a part of himself, part of his soul, within the theater in which he performs. This wood, these timbers, are from the very first playhouse in all of Europe, which has absorbed countless performances.... We are what is left."

Burbage first began to tremble. "*You!* Ghosts! You are what Richard saw! You killed Thomas Radclyffe! Murdered him!"

"*We acted only to protect ourselves. In vain.*"

Burbage stood motionless, only his thoughts whirling — fear, anger, confusion — and he could not function until he accepted his inability to accept. "I do not understand ... I cannot believe this."

"*You are not an actor. You will not understand.*" The central figure continued to stare at him with the frozen expression of the mask. "*Tell your brother Richard — he will understand. It will comfort him. He knows* us, *but he does not realize it. Tell him not to fear us.*"

Burbage found he had taken one step backward, and another. The masked figure raised his voice. "*Leave us! To complete our performance!*"

Burbage felt his fear taking precedence over all his other emotions, and he took another step backward, staring at the troupe of spectral figures one final time. Then he turned to flee from the ruins of the Globe Theatre.

The wreckage of the Globe lay in Maiden Lane, covered with snow, until the winter of 1614 passed. *"And the next spring it was new builded in a far finer manner than before."*

— Master John Stow, *General Chronicle of England.*

With a tile roof, and new timber.

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Installment 5: *In Which the Left Hand Giveth Praise and the Right Hand Sprayeth for Worms of Evil*

I have suffered for your sins, children. I have seen BUCKAROO BANZAI (20th Century Fox). So you don't have to. An unintelligible farrago of inaudible sound mix, bad whitefolks MTV video acting, blatant but hotly denied ripoff of the *Doc Savage* crew and *ouevre* spiced with swipes from Mike Moorcock's Jerry Cornelius stories, a plot that probably makes sense only in Minkowski Space, six funny lines, four clever sight gags, and billions of dollars' worth of promotional hype such as Big Brother-style rallies at sf conventions — all intended to make this "an instant underground cult classic."

Were you to fail to heed my warning, you might go to see this village idiot of a movie; and you might go back to see it three or four times more in an effort to unravel a storyline in which mindlessness reaches deification and in an effort to decode the garbled soundtrack; all in aid of gleaning some sense from a film you'll be told is "fresh and innovative."

But if you are thus foolhardy, you will find yourself at one with Brother Theodore's monologue about rats, in which he says: "You can train a rat. Yes, if you work for hours and days and months and years, you *can* train a rat. But when you're done, all you'll have is a *trained rat*!"

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This had been ahomiletic analogy. God knows I've done all I can.

What *Buckaroo Banzai* pretends to be (and with the pretense brings new meaning to the word boredom), REPO MAN (Universal) sure as hell *is*. Cleverly constructed, freshly mounted, engagingly acted, bizarrely inveigling and, in the words of Pliny the Younger, *sui generis*. Ninety-two minutes of enthusiastically nihilistic anarchy.

This is a first feature for writer-director Alex Cox and as a virgin effort indicates arrival on the cinematic scene of a quirky, elitist (in the positive sense) intelligence worthy of our close attention. Through word-of-mouth prior to its initial release, I had been advised there was "something special" going on in *Repo Man*, and I shouldn't miss it. As I had not been as warm to *Quadrophenia* or *Liquid Sky* — two "punk" films about which I'd heard raves — as I'd hoped to be, I didn't expect much from *Repo Man*. In fact, as a "control" element of my viewing, I took along both a devotee of the music of Steve Reich (which music makes my headbone throb) and a Jewish American Princess. My thought was that these disparate world-views would provide insights into my own opinion. The over-age new-waver burbled with joy, and the Beverly Hills materialist grew more and more bewildered. But when we emerged from the screening, both admitted the film refused to let go of their risibilities.

My Reichfreak contends *Repo Man* is about belief systems. My social butterfly insists it's about people purposely alienating themselves from reality.

I think both of them have too much book-larnin'. This movie is about Otto, a spike-haired layabout who falls in with Bud, a car repossessor; falls in lust with Leila, one of the happyface-wearing numbers of the Smiley cult who live by the tenets of a philosophy to be found in the book *Diaretics: The New Science of the Mind*; falls into trouble with the thug-like car thieves, the Rodriguez Brothers, with Agent Rogersz and her cadre of secret service bloodhounds, with his ex-buddies of the pink&purple hair set whose collective social conscience is best expressed by Duke, who says, "Let's go do some crimes," to which Archie responds, "Yeah, let's go order sushi and not pay," and falls into the middle of a situation in which the burned-out nuclear scientist J. Frank Parnell tries to stay ahead of all or some or none of the above who are trying to filch his '64 Chevy Malibu, in the trunk of which reside deadly aliens who can fry you to taco chips with a hellish blast of light.

That's what it's about.

And get away from me with that straitjacket.

If for no other reason — and don't tell me the plot as outlined above

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doesn't make you go squishy all over — the acting by the inimitable Harry Dean Stanton as Bud, and Emilio Estevez as Otto makes this a don't-miss flick. Throughout my screening of the film I kept mumbling, "That kid playing Otto is a dead ringer for the young Martin Sheen, even the way he walks, the way he stands, jeez it's uncanny," until my *maven* of minimalist music thumped me and pointed out that Marty Sheen's real name is Estevez, and that Emilio is his kid. Oh.

Dozens of little touches in the movie provide a deranged superimposed reality that draws nothing but admiration: all the food is generic, including blue-striped cans that are simply labeled FOOD; Otto's family is mesmerized by TV envangelist Reverend Larry and his Honor Roll of the Chariots of Fire; no faintest touch of sentimentality is permitted onscreen distraction, as when Otto is about to fly off with the aliens and Leila screams, "But what about our relationship?" and Otto remains true to the tone of the film by replying, "Fuck that!"

Repo Man, when first released, drew such confused reviews that Universal pulled it back quickly. But true madness cannot long be squelched by the mentality of accountants; and now this looney thing has been let loose again. Look around and find it. Unless you are one of those dismal unfortunates who thinks Jerry Lewis is funny, you are guaranteed a filmic experience that can only be compared, in terms of a good time, with watching Richard Nixon sweat on television.

GHOSTBUSTERS (Columbia), as most of you know, was the box office smash of the summer. Good. It is more wonderful than one would have expected from the directorial paws of Ivan Reitman, source of *Cannibal Girls*, *Animal House*, *National Lampoon's Vacation* and *Heavy Metal*, among other class acts.

But Harold Ramis, Bill Murray, Sigourney Weaver, Rick Moranis, Annie Potts and Dan Ackroyd all running amuck chasing demonic presences in what starts out to be an urbane yet cockeyed slapstick fantasy that smoothly turns into something Lovecraft might have scripted if he'd beaten the Man with the Scythe and lived on into the era of SFX, provide Reitman with such a gobbet of goodies that *Ghostbusters* emerges as one of those films you see again and again for mounting pleasure.

Had I not spent two columns on the Stephen King essay, and had I not been captured by extraterrestrials masquerading as Moonies, who spirited me away to their underground lair beneath Orem, Utah, where they tortured me with Naugahyde and hot fudge sundaes, thereby causing me to miss my deadline last issue (you don't think I was intentionally *late*, do you?) — I'd have had this review of *Ghost-*

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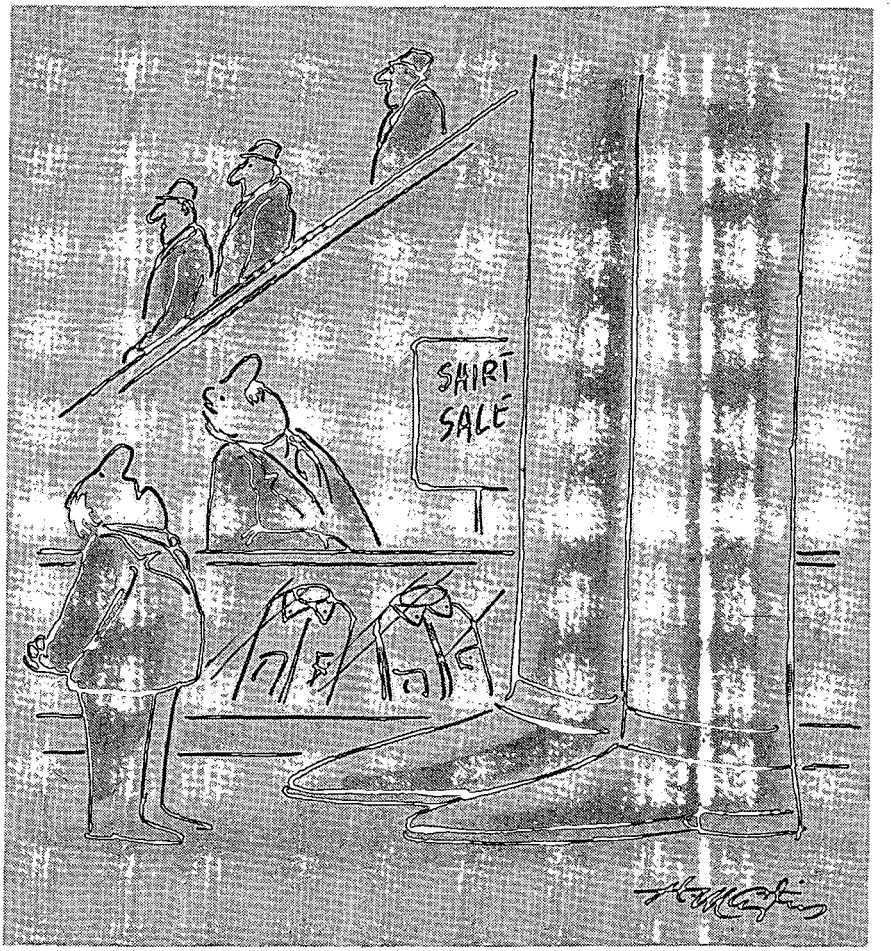
busters to you in time for you to have made an informed viewing decision, rather than just stumbling across it in the twelve hundred theaters where it was block-booked through the hot months.

And you'd also have gotten my vituperative observations about an evil little item called *Gremlins*. But that will have to wait till next time, when We Who Have Gone Blind From Watching Awful Films On Your Behalf return with the startling conclusion of (wait for it) *Worms of Evil*!



"You'll find the tall men's shop on the 5th floor, sir."

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In L. A. you need a car you can count on. So when the car thieves took my forgiving '67 Camaro, I went after her...

My Old Car

BY
THOMAS WYLDE

I guess you could say I loved that car.

A 1967 Camaro — and after owning it thirteen years, the damned thing was on its way to being a classic. Sort of.

The main thing about the car was that it had never let me down, despite years of spotty maintenance and neglect.

One summer it got me the length of Death Valley on a fan belt that looked like a cat-o'-nine-tails.

It had a knack for keeping a grip on just enough water or brake fluid or air pressure to get me home, no matter how badly it was hurting.

Three times I ran it out of gas, and each time I managed to coast into a filling station and right up to the pumps.

It was a car that forgave me anything.

I ran it for years on the same sludgy swamp oil, the kind with chunks of primeval dinosaur floating on top, but when I finally yanked the engine three years ago, it was gorgeous inside. A beautiful car.

And they got her — car theives.

Car muggers.

They got the plates, too — but they'd be on something else by now. So if you ever see a car — any make, model, or year — with California plates TPX 935, call the cops. Them's my plates, Brother.

A while back I quit my job in North Hollywood. No big deal, I just wanted more time for my life, and they seemed to think they owned me ten hours a day, six days a week. So one Friday night I left them with a memo demanding less time (and more money, just to make it interesting). Then I split.

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I spent the next week at home, sort of hanging around the phone and hoping it wouldn't ring. Of course it *did* ring, about 9:15 Monday morning. I stood by the phone wondering what I was going to tell them. Because I really didn't want to work for anybody right then.

But it was just some geek selling newspaper subscriptions. I went back to the shower pissed off and relieved.

The whole week went by, and not a peep out of the company.

O.K. — I was ready to move on. It was Friday night and I felt all right. I jumped into the Camaro and we made a few stops, and so forth. No need to go into that.

The next morning I trotted out to the curb on my way to some Saturday errands. No car.

For a full minute I stood there like a fool and looked at the spot where I'd parked it the night before. It took only an instant to ransack my memory — I hadn't lent the car to anyone, or called to have a garage pick it up, or put an ad in the paper offering the car for free to anyone who could read and drive.

The car was all the way gone. I walked slowly to the corner and looked down the street. I live around the corner from a rather steep hill in Tujunga. Had the car come unglued from its parking spot, it might have rolled a few feet into somebody's flower bed. But nope. No sign of it. (Good, I thought. Who needs hassles with horticulturists?)

I walked on down the hill to the next corner. My legs were rubbery, and there was a hot, dry wind blowing between my ears — like my own personal Santa Ana.

My Camaro was nowhere in sight, and if had been out there, I'd have seen it. The car was painted orange.

Eventually I walked three or four miles down Hillrose, straining to see up and down every cross street. Maybe some kids had slipped the door lock with a coat hanger and coasted down the hill. It could have been rolled quite a ways. For a while I was quite hopeful.

I kept walking down Hillrose, following the lines of gravity. There was no sign of it. Apparently whoever had taken the car had managed to get it started. They could have driven the damn thing anywhere. Anywhere at all.

I walked back and called the police.

Nobody answered.

O.K., it was Saturday. In my phone book — and it was the latest edition — they give a number to call from the Sunland-Tujunga area. Foothill Division, L.A.P.D. I called and got no answer. There was a listing for the Detectives, so I called that, too. No answer.

I called — by accident — the number for emergency service, and this time I got an answer. It was a recording: "Police Department. Foot-

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hill Division. All our emergency lines are busy right now. If you need a patrol car, stay on the line." I got off the line.

I figured not being able to drive to Lumber City for a couple of C-clamps was not — in essence — an emergency. No SWAT teams, thanks anyway.

Off and on Saturday I tried the two numbers from the book, and no one answered. Later I found out the first number was several years out of date, and the one for Detectives rang in an office where nobody hung out during the weekend.

Eventually I climbed onto shank's mare Sunday afternoon and made it down the hill to Vons. One has to eat, after all. But like a fool, I bought too much junk. I managed to get it all in one double-bagged package, but the damned thing was *heavy*. It was a long walk back up the hill. My arms were shaking. The only good thing was that it didn't rain, although it sure looked like it wanted to — big black clouds, and so forth.

I ate some grub and watched TV.

Every few seconds I would think of something else in the trunk of my car that I'd probably never see again.

Like an idiot, I kept a lot of stuff in my trunk — tools, mostly, but other items as well. A sleeping bag, an old water bed mattress, a camera tripod. A new set of rear-wheel brake shoes that I'd never got around to putting on. And so forth.

I was pretty depressed that evening.

Even Andy Rooney couldn't cheer me up.

By eight o'clock the clouds that had been threatening all day delivered. The rain was light but steady, and slowly building. By ten it was intermittently hard.

The phone rang.

I jumped and cursed, as usual. The sound of the phone had never been music to my ears.

I turned down the TV and took a deep breath, counting the rings. I picked up after the fourth. There was no one there, just the surging rush of static.

Then I heard something faint and tentative.

It was a voice like a nail scraping across iron, half-buried in static. I stood shivering with the phone pressed hard against my ear, my hand clamped over the other.

"End of Burkett."

The words whispered out of the haze of scratchy thunder noise. *I think.*

In my neck of the woods, the phone sometimes rings all by itself. Usually all you hear is the dial tone. Sometimes there's ... nothing there at all.

Maybe this was one of those times.

Maybe there *was* only static in my ear that night.

I'll never be certain, although something *did* happen up at the end of Burkett Street that night.

*Some*thing happened.

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I hung up the phone.

I paced around my little place, then cranked up the sound on the TV. A moment later I turned the TV off and grabbed my coat. It was raining hard by then, and Burkett Street was two miles away.

I'd have to walk. There was nobody I wanted to drag out of a warm house on the basis of that phone call.

The last thing I grabbed on my way out was my car keys. Force of habit? Nope. I hoped I'd get a chance to *use* 'em.

O.K., you're thinking, there you go hiking off in the rain in the direction of Burkett Street. How did I know which *end* of Burkett to check out?

That was easy. Burkett runs its entire length in the Sunland-Tujunga valley. Two ends, both of which are easily available (if you don't mind the hike in the pouring rain). But one is smack up against a shopping center in the middle of the building district. Lots of lights, lots of people, lots of traffic. Not a good place to hide an orange Camaro.

The other end of Burkett sort of staggers and dies in the hills. Out there it isn't even a real paved road, just a muddy haven for potholes that runs past a few derelict farms. Not real farms, but falling-down junky areas, overhung with pepper trees and tall, shaggy eucalypti. I'd seen the place in daylight. You'd be surprised how many junked cars you'd find. Nobody complains. Why should they? It's a whole different world out there at the end of Burkett.

It was almost eleven when I got to the end of the pavement. The foothills came right down to the road on the north. On the south were a couple of old houses, one contructed of unpainted wood, the other an authentic pioneer in stone. There were lights on in the stone house. But no orange Camaro out front.

That was O.K. I wasn't at the end of Burkett. Not yet.

The road took off in a wallow of mud, up a hill and around to the left, then down, down into an old creek bed valley.

That valley had a bad reputation. There was a ramshackle collection of wooden buildings — or had been when I was a kid — brimming with mean dogs and meaner people. A place of decay and corruption. I'd never seen it at night. I'd never wanted to.

As I started up the hill, I rather hoped the whole place had been bulldozed into rural oblivion.

I was passing the stone house. Behind me a dog started barking. I turned around, then crouched down in the rain. A light came on in the wooden house. I held my breath. The dog barked and whined and shut up. A door slammed. After a moment the light went out.

I slumped in the mud in the dark. It occurred to me I wouldn't need to

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run into drug-crazed car thieves in the middle of nowhere to find myself in trouble. A couple of ignorant farm dogs stoned on rabies could do the trick.

And while I was on the subject, what the hell *was* I going to do if I stumbled into those drug-crazed car freaks?

Suddenly I felt very cold and wet and sorry that I was anywhere near the end of Burkett Street. I wanted to drag my sodden body home, take a hot shower, and crawl into bed. In the morning — bright, safe Monday morning — I'd call the cops, report the car missing, maybe hint at Burkett Street....

Because until the car was reported stolen, I was just another prowler in the dead of night.

For a few minutes I simply crouched in the mud and let the rain dump on me. I was cold and scared and angry about being scared. I wanted to go home. I felt like an idiot.

But what about the phone call?

"End of Burkett," the voice — or something — had said. I had to have a look at the end of Burkett.

Then I could go home.

Just *look* at it, pal. You don't have to *do* anything. As if there would be anything to *do*. Chances were, I'd come over the top of the hill, look down and see nothing, and turn around.

"O.K.," I muttered. "Sounds like a plan."

I stood and continued up the hill. At the top, where the road swung down and to the left, there was a huge oak tree. I stood under the tree and looked down the road.

The tree hadn't been drenched by the rain yet, so it was possible to stand under it and not get soaked. Of course it was too late for me — I was sopping — but at least the rain wasn't in my eyes. I could see right down the road to the house.

The house was all lit up inside, and I could just make out people moving around in there, jerking past the windows — jumpy, stumbling shadows on the window shades. Even in the pounding rain, I could hear the music. Rock 'n' roll. There was a party going on.

As soon as I saw the house, a memory from high school reared up. A friend of mine had a '49 Mercury, and some hoods copped it. We found it on Burkett Street at blazing noon. The hoods were there, too, and I took off running. My friend hung around and got stomped. After that his family moved and he went with them. The hoods spent time at Juvee, then probably joined the army or something ("war" having been invented expressly for the amusement of folks like those).

That was more than ten years ago, and it was a memory I had managed to do without.

Until this moment.

It occurred to me that this memory

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was the true source of the "Burkett" whisper.

Blast from the Past.

I'd used the technical deficiencies of General Telephone on a rainy night to produce a little psychological kicker. A kind of static hiss Rorschach test.

So here I was, all primed to ride into the valley of the '49 Mercs.

Oh, boy.

The house was maybe eighty yards down the hill. The road and yard beside the house were full of cars, shiny in the rain, reflecting light from the windows. There were several orange cars, but I couldn't see what kind. I had to get closer. Damn it....

I stepped out from under the oak tree and started down the hill into the creek valley. I tried to get my nerves under control. If anybody saw me and ran out of the house, I'd have to take off up the hill. That wouldn't leave me much time to search for my car.

I was still forty yards away when I started to crouch down as I walked. TV cop-show stuff — maybe I'd turn out to be Mannix or somebody.

The music got louder. I tried to concentrate on the many cars parked along the dirt road and in the yard.

There were maybe twenty cars parked out there.

That was one hell of a party they were having.

By the time I reached the first of the cars, my heart was pounding. I crouched beside the car, hiding and waited for my breathing to slow. Every breath produced a plume of steam that was slashed by the rain.

I sneaked to the next car. An orange Camaro, amazingly enough. But it was a '69, a Z28. Mine was a '67 Rally Sport. Close but no cigar. I moved on to the next car.

The cars were generally what you'd call "muscle cars" — Camaros, Mustangs, Firebirds, and so forth. There were also some four-wheel-drive Jeeps and Land-Rovers, all with oversized tires and thick black roll bars. Lots of custom bodywork on the cars — flared fenders and the like — some of which were still painted in gray primer. These guys were car folk, shade-tree mechanics — fixers and rebuilders and hot rodders. Maybe I'd come to the right place, after all. I moved on.

I found another orange car, but it was a '65 Mustang.

By this time I was within twenty feet of the house. I could hear voices and shouts mingled with the music. It sounded like a whole crowd of loud-mouthed hardcases in there, probably gang-banging their grandmothers.

I had looked at every car parked out there — no orange '67 Camaro. I figured I might as well go home. Then I saw a twinkling of chrome attached to a dark shape around back of the house.

I stepped out from behind a dripping alder tree and duck walked be-

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side the house. The dark shape remained dark — there were no lights on back there to show the way. I crept past the house ten feet from the windows.

I was halfway there when I caught sight of a glimmer of orange paint coming from the shape.

Then all the lights in the house went out.

I dropped to the mud and listened. Even the rock 'n' roll had stopped. And there wasn't a peep from the folks inside. The dark house was menacing in the rain. Suddenly it was deserted, abandoned.

For a crazy moment I thought maybe I'd passed out in the fright of my reconnaissance. Maybe a couple of hours had passed and the party was over, everybody gone home. For a moment I almost believed it. I sneaked a look into the front yard — still crowded with the dark shapes of cars. O.K., scratch temporary insanity.

What the hell had happened?

If the power had failed, that would account for the lights and the music stopping. But why wouldn't a house full of half-drunk party-hearty macho crazies set up a howl when the power failed?

This house was deathly quiet.

Then I saw a ghostly light moving through the house, a pale flickering light that passed the shaded windows, slipping from the back of the house into the front, all in unearthly silence. I crouched in the mud with the rain beating on my skull, trying not to believe what I was seeing.

Then there was an explosion of light and noise and shouts of "Happy birthday!"

I slumped in the mud.

A birthday party.

I had witnessed the coming of the cake, all aglitter with candles, brought through the darkened house so everybody could enjoy the wonderful spectacle of it all, the cake carried regally through the hushed silence until the moment of aching surprise.

The music blared amid screams of delight. I got up from the mud and continued toward the back of the house.

Where I found my car.

It was pulled up around back, out of sight of the road, parked maybe five feet from the house. The license plates were missing, but that was it.

I made sure, checking minute points of blemish only an owner would know. The tiny dent on the nose where I'd run into a young kid out driving with his new license. The cracked backlight lens where some woman had rear-ended me one morning on the way to work. And on the back bumper, the two mounting tubes for my bike rack.

There was no doubt about it — this was my car.

The wind picked up and whipped the rain into my face. I heard something thumping against the car on the far side. I went around and found a

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length of black wire lashing the car. Phone line, blown down, half-wrapped around the front tire.

I touched the wire and jerked back. There was a faint electrical charge on it.

I thought about the phone call that had brought me here, but this was no explanation. None at all.

There was no time to ponder.

I took a breath and reached for the wire. I yanked it away from the car and went back around to the driver's side.

The door was unlocked. I quickly climbed inside, if only to get out of the rain. I closed the door very quietly. It wouldn't latch all the way, not unless I slammed it. That would come later.

For a moment I thought about what I ought to do. The car was not officially "stolen," since I'd made no report yet. I couldn't know if these folks in the house were the thieves or merely the suckers who'd bought a hot car. Maybe the car was a birthday present. If I simply drove the car away, that might screw up everything.

But I couldn't see going up to the door and asking humbly for my car back. If they stole it, I'd be in trouble. And if they didn't, I'd be in the middle of a legal squall. How'd I know they had the car? I'd trespassed to find it. Sorry 'bout that.

I got the keys out of my pocket and slipped the ignition key into the slot. It fit.

Why was I surprised?

I had to look around the interior of the car, finding points of identity that only I could know. Suddenly I needed reassurance this *was* my car. It would be too horrible to end up stealing somebody else's car by mistake. And get caught. Only to find my own Camaro parked around the corner from my place, parked there Friday night when I couldn't get into my regular place — a fact I'd somehow been suppressing all this time.

But no — damn it! This *was* my car.

"Shut up and do what you have to do," I whispered to myself.

I made my plan. I would coast the car out around from the back of the house and down to the dirt road, where I could try to start her up. Maybe in the noise and revelry of the party, nobody would even notice. Then, when I was safe back home, I could call the police. Emergency number this time, just to see what they might want to do about the folks in the house at the end of Burkett Street.

"O.K., sounds like a plan."

I left the ignition off and released the hand brake. Nothing happened. I wiggled the stick. I was in neutral, all right, but the car wouldn't roll. There wasn't enough of a slope around back of the house. I'd have to push the car out to the side, maybe twenty feet, then the slope should get ahold of her.

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I made sure the steering wheel was centered, then I got out and pushed, holding onto the frame by the wind-wing.

The mud had a grip on her, but a moment of rocking got her free. As she started to roll, I ducked inside to crank the wheel a bit. I came slowly around the corner, fighting the steering wheel more and more. I was swinging out too wide. In another few feet I'd run her off the gravel and into a ditch full of rushing water. I jammed on the brakes, then wrenched the wheel to the right. As soon as I let off the brake, the car started to roll, faster and faster. The slope down to the road had got her.

After that it all happened real fast. I jumped inside, slamming the door — in my haste — and rolled on down, steering like mad to get past the parked cars. It would not do to broadside somebody's new car and get myself trapped.

I hit the road and cranked the wheel violently to get turned toward the giant oak at the top of the hill I had to climb. I heard a yell from the house.

The music was off, the front door thrown open wide, and a bunch of big angry guys was swarming out.

I pumped the gas, then hit the ignition, praying for a fast start. My car is a bit cold-blooded — hard to start and easy to stall for the few minutes.

At that moment the skies opened up and the rain began to drum the roof of my car with a deafening roar. I couldn't even hear my engine cranking in the noise, but I knew what it must doing. Old habit controlled the action of my foot on the gas. I knew just how much to pump.

Something hit the side of the car. I looked to my right. There was somebody there, pounding on the door. Something gleamed in his hand. He had a pistol. The door was locked, but the window was down a few inches. His hand was inside, squeezing its way down to the locking latch.

I didn't want to think about what I'd do if he pointed the gun at me. But all he was trying to do was get the door open.

I took a moment to lock the door on my side, then I switched off the ignition and pumped the gas. Another guy had joined the one with the gun. They were both pulling on the window, and it was coming down. His arm strained to force its way inside, his fingers only inches from the latch. Good thing this guy had thick forearms — huge, muscular forearms.

Then I thought: *if* he gets inside here, the size of his arms will no longer be so beneficial to me.

Another big guy had come around to my side of the car and was banging on the door. They were all around me.

I eased off the gas and twisted the ignition key again. Suddenly the noise of the rain was louder, and there was one mean mother-thumper climbing

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into my car pointing a gun at me.

I jammed my foot down and the car lurched forward, throwing the guy backward. He was off balance. I floored it and the Camaro tore off up the muddy road. I heard a loud *crack,* and my rearview mirror blew up all over me, then I was alone in the car, roaring up the hill.

I looked back. One guy was in the mud, pointing his arm at me — his gun — but his friends were running after the car, spoiling his shot. I saw him waving his arms as he jumped to his feet. Get clear! Get clear!

Then I was at the top of the hill.

For an instant everything was strangely quiet, as I passed under the rain shelter of the old oak, then I was around the corner and on my way down the hill, barreling ass down the slippery hill with no lights.

I zoomed past the two farmhouses and bumped onto the paved road. I was back into civilization again.

Then my engine died, and I was whistling through the dark, powerless but ecstatic. My gas guage read zero. There had been just enough gas in the tank to get me over that hill and out of the valley of car thieves.

Gas was no problem. Burkett was downhill all the way to its other end. I kept on coasting. It felt great.

I cruised on down to an all-night gas station, made the corner, and rolled to a stop right beside the pump.

That made four times. For a minute all I did was sit there and breathe. And grin a lot.

After a while a young man came out of the station shack. "Five dollars of regular," I told him.

He cocked his head. "You're parked at the self-serve pump."

I had forgotten. "Sorry." I jumped out and went back to the pump. The kid hung around.

"You been crawling in the mud?"

"Yeah. It's a hobby of mine."

He shrugged and looked at the car. "That's a '68?"

"No, a '67."

"Practically a classic," he said. "Wanna sell it?"

"Nope." I was used to that. The Camaro is a popular car for hot rodders. I've even seen books on how to customize the 327 engine for more power, and so forth. Maybe I'd do it myself one day.

"I'll check your oil," the guy suddenly said. "Long as I'm out here."

"Go ahead." I pumped in five bucks of gas, then hung the nozzle up. As I came around beside the pump, I saw a bullet hole on the rear fender. Jesus Christ. Lucky to get out that place.

"Some kind of joke, right?" the pump jocky said, coming around.

"Bullet hole."

He looked at it. "Not that." He jerked his thumb at my raised hood. I stepped forward and looked.

My little car had not let me down, despite a certain disadvantage.

Those bastards had stolen my engine.

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Ms. Jacobs' first story for F&SF is a fresh and surprising variation on a classic fantasy theme. The author is 32, lives in West Virginia where she taught sociology at Marshall University. She says she has been writing Fantasy and SF since she was twelve, has sold a couple of stories and recently gave up teaching to resume her writing.

The Milk of Paradise

BY
RIVKA JACOBS

"That's a girl, that's right, excellent! Hold it there! That's right, honey, honey, good girl! Beautiful! Beautiful, that's right, that's a girl...." The shutter whirred and clicked as Vide Ring twisted, leaned, or bent into as many positions as his model, Crystal Haines.

She obeyed. Her face was an instant dough to be shaped into smiles, nonexpression, or hauteur. Honey, honey, good girl, nice love, do as the man tells you....

Crystal was corn silk hair and cornflower blue eyes that shone as if ball lighning had been trapped behind frozen irises. Bones that were lean and long, broad at cheek and shoulder and narrow at waist and hip; Crystal Haines was sinew covered with velvet, she was both dancer and dance.

"Fine, fine, beautiful," Vide was chanting. Snap and again snap — the air-conditioner hissed in the soundproof studio. Then all was utter quiet. Then came a flurry of sounds: metallic scuffling, bouncing echoes, leather cases popping open — the plop of the cameras — case popping closed.

Crystal straightened on her dais. Her wine-colored satin sheath slipped off one shoulder. Perspiration dotted through her body makeup and filled her nostrils with her own sweet, pungent scent.

"That's cool, honey. Perfect. No more today," he tossed the words over his shoulder. He did a double take.

Crystal was motionless, an enchanting statue awaiting — something.

"I said it's O.K., baby. You can go home now." His handsome bronze features screwed in consternation. His styled mahogany hair glistened

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under the intense lights.

She suddenly moved, gliding the step down and gracefully adjusting her shoulder strap. "Thanks, Ringer," she said flatly, and drifted past him to the dressing room door.

It was a gray autumn afternoon when Crystal emerged from the West Side apartment-studio and descended the stone steps. The city's dank, prickling smog had condensed on every surface. The sidewalk was dark with moisture. It stank of city life; of urine, dog droppings, roaches, candy wrappers.

Crystal wore an expensive chamois coat that hung in great undulating pleats to her ankles. Her wallet and keys were in one coat pocket. Her travel shoes, low-heeled pumps with crossed tassels on the toes, clicked dully on the pavement as she began the walk to her East Side apartment, a walk that usually took her through Central Park.

Her breast-length golden hair, crimped by the humidity, glimmered like silk with every step.

She blinked at other pedestrians as memories of bright lights, Ringer's smooth voice, the sleepy comfort of complete obedience flooded the dreary real world. *Honey, honey, good girl, sweet girl* ... her body in motion like a marionette, or supine with knees akimbo, a fixed butterfly speared again and again and again....

The step, step, step that almost matched her own at first seemed something abstract, a rhythm to be toyed with by a blue-green imagination. Crystal abruptly surfaced.

She tensed.

Her nerves itched her skin in a dozen places. She sped slightly and thrust her fists further into her large coat pockets.

She listened.

The pursuing footfalls were slightly slower or faster; she couldn't be sure. A car, its headlights gleaming in the premature dusk, wound by on its way to the Seventy-second Street exit. Two joggers, grunting and wheezing, thumped past her on either side. A male bicyclist whizzed behind the car, his bright blue parka glistening with mist. Crystal wished she had taken a cab.

"Miss," a male voice sounded from behind her. "Miss, wait...."

Crystal froze, not even sure if she was capable of running or screaming. *Nothing will happen, it's nothing,* she hurriedly repeated to herself.

A series of rapid, whacking sounds, then phlegmy gasps were in her ears. "I'm sorry," a voice panted.

She turned and was surprised to see a young, dark-haired man who clutched his heaving chest. He was well dressed in a three-piece, wine-red suit. He sported a single ear dangle, as Ringer did, and a lapel pin, plus a number of gold and garnet rings. He apparently liked rough gold-work and garnets. "I'm sorry," he said

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again. "I was hoping you'd let me walk with you."

"What?" she said distractedly, still studying him.

His turquoise irises were breathtaking. His inky fine hair was boyishly askew. His complexion was like translucent alabaster; the shadows of his blue veins branched from his temples and mouth corners, down his neck and hands. His lowered eyelashes were thick, jet black. Faint creases of stress and fatigue slanted from his inner eyes to his cheeks. He continued to labor for breath but managed a sincere, apologetic smile.

Crystal almost physically moved as that smile, those lips, beamed at her. *Oh, god,* she thought to herself in amazement, *is he beautiful.* "I don't un ... understand," she stuttered aloud. She felt herself blushing.

His eyes shone as he tossed back his downy hair. "I want to walk with you," he repeated in a voice that was low but light. "I'm sort of afraid," he added. "I just thought we could keep each other company until we reach safer ground." It was becoming chilly, and the air clouded in front of his mouth as he spoke.

She watched tiny, wispy ringlets of hair stick to his forehead, to his ears and jaw. She saw that he was perspiring — in this scratch-throat weather, he was clammy and weak.

"I'm an escapee," he continued, as if expecting her abrupt change of expression. He laughed.

"Escapee?" she repeated, searching his face.

He appeared as if he were trying to say something, but then abruptly shook as if palsied. He began to sway like late summer wheat in an early evening breeze.

Crystal jerked a hand from a coat pocket and grasped his elbow to steady him. "Are you all right?" she blurted.

In an instant, before she knew how it happened, he had slipped his arm around her waist and she had placed her hand between his shoulder blades and they were ambling forward. She watched the side of his face; his profile was perfectly classical. A thrill twisted her stomach, her heart raced. Was she dreaming? Had two minutes gone by since she'd first heard his footsteps? She felt herself streaming like water over the lip of a falls, suspended between the up and the crashing down below. She tried to untangle her thoughts, to fight the current. But they were moving pleasantly. "I don't even know your name," she said to him, and unconsciously started to remove her hand.

He faltered, seeming to lose his balance until she replaced her hand. "I know. I'm sorry, this must appear weird to you," he said softly. "I'm Neal Allen."

"Crystal Haines," she replied. "An escapee?" she asked again.

Another car shifted by. The air oozed languidly. The haze had melted

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into a drizzle that had blended once more into a haze.

He shook his hair from his eyes. "I escaped from a hospital," he said hoarsely. "I have leukemia. I'm supposed to be flat on my back in a white gown. I'm supposed to be strung out on blood and chemotherapy. Needles in my arms, my hair starting to fall out. Supposed to be; so I decided to escape."

"My God, you...."

"I'm a dead man," he interrupted in an offhand way. "But I will go out in style."

She self-consciously pressed her arm around his shoulders as if to support him. She couldn't think of anything else to do.

"Do you know what it's like to feel the world in pain?" he plaintively asked. "To know that your body can no longer fight infection? Because the chemotherapy commits overkill ... and it hurts like hell. It feels like every fiber of my being is on fire. The pain in my joints and muscles is awful. They pulled the plugs this morning, but it wasn't until late afternoon that some of my strength returned. Platelets are up, and down, remission, or death wins...."

"I really think you'd better get a cab." She halted them. "Which hospital were you in? Do you have a wife or girlfriend?"

"No." He stared into her eyes, his own deep and brilliant. "Only my cousin. Keep walking with me, please...."

That time his words caught on a frightening, hollow sound. She complied, near tears, her indecision and frustration stronger than her pity.

"Actually," he continued, "they don't know if it *is* carcinoma. They don't know what it is — which is the whole point, of course. I'm a guinea pig."

The exit was in sight. "I live nearby," she said as she moved with him hesitantly. "I'll call a cab from there."

He sighed deeply, stopped walking, withdrew his arm. "No, it's O.K." He seemed to hear something; he glanced across the street to the corner of a building, then returned his attention to Crystal. "Listen, you can do one favor. Please. You're so beautiful and understanding. Give me your phone number. My cousin will call you when it's almost over. Come to see me, please." He was tranquil, as if hardly expecting such a boon from a perfect stranger.

Crystal was feeling uncomfortable. The jouncy beats of Ringer and others like him were being submerged by this man's flowing, riverlike manner. She preferred to be pushed, not pulled along. To be responsible for fulfilling a beautiful youth's last wish...?

"I just want you to be there," he urged, his tone more hopeful.

She apathetically shrugged her acquiescence. She recited her telephone number. He repeated it silently over and over, his mouth moving slightly. He was very careful about

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opening his mouth.

Crystal, seemingly mesmerized, reached a long-nailed finger and touched his upper lip; she immediately yanked her hand away in embarrassment as his eyes darkened visibly. His pupils were dilated and glittery. "I ... I don't know why I did that," she said liquidly. "You seem to have trouble speaking...."

He was still; the perspiration was rolling in tiny rivulets from his temples, past his ears. A sickly sweet scent reached her nostrils. "My gums," he murmured, "they bleed. My teeth are coming out also. Not a very pleasant disease, but what one is?"

His sad expression made her heart thud. A spell of sympathy kept her eyes locked with his.

"I'll leave you for now," he whispered. "Thanks." He lifted one of her hands and kissed her ivory knuckles, her fingers, her fingertips.

Crystal was spinning. As impossible as it was, she was completely captivated. "Wait, where are you going now?" She grasped his hand. "Come home with me, stay with me until you want to go to the hospital..." *What was she saying?* she thought in her excitement. *What was she doing?*

"No. I just want to say good-bye to the city. He'll call you when it's time. But thanks for the invitation." Again came that soul-stirring expression. He withdrew his hand and turned away.

She watched his rounded shoulders and bowed back, until a crowd of people swallowed the sight of him.

Traffic noises, jostling teenagers, shouting children suddenly burst, and showered her with fragments of sound. She was stunned by herself. Then a habitual insouciance fell like snow, glazing her mind as she continued the walk home alone.

Crystal's mint-green bathroom walls were obscured by cabinets and shelves. The hypoallergenic shampoos, hair conditioners, moisturizers, skin creams, body oils, cleansing lotions, perfumes, colognes, scrub soaps, and dozens of standard makeup products were stored regularly like groceries on display in a supermarket.

She inhaled the clean, humid air of the heated room, and rose with crystal-bell splashes from the womblike warmth of her oil-softened bath water. She tugged up the plug; its silver-bead chain slithered and looped as she set the stopper on the tub edge, pulling the plug with a plop back into the draining, greenish water.

Crystal ignored it, and stepped onto a fluffy beige rug. She patted herself dry with a plump terry cloth towel. She scanned her collection of jars, tubes, bottles, and boxes, and selected what she'd be needing this evening, as every evening.

Nail polish and strengthener, pum-

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ice and lotion for her ankles and toes, after-bath skin toner and freshener, eye cream, dusting powder, hair remover....

The routine was the same, even on nights when she entertained. After all, her body was her business.

Vide Ring was a free-lance photographer; also a procurer, connection, and agent. To supplement his income, he said. Or was the photography the action in the wings and the seedier business the onstage event? Crystal didn't care. She had been like hundreds of girls who hit New York each month, expecting beauty and personality or sex to take them to the pages or covers of *Vogue, Cosmopolitan,* and *Glamour.*

She had been twenty-one, from Tampa, Florida, riding north with her cocaine-dealing boyfriend, all the way to the Big City. But after only two days in New York, her boyfriend had been mysteriously busted. Crystal had auspiciously met Vide Ring only hours after this event, while she sat crying in a van parked outside a police precinct station. Vide Ring had offered her the dream-come-true of a lifetime.

Now she knew she was as successful as she'd ever be. The family back home received money and inflated anecdotes about "the business." Every so often an ad she'd posed for would appear in a national magazine, and her sister would immediately write her about the sensation it caused in her Tampa high school.

Now Crystal thought very little about home, as she rubbed her skin admiringly, painted her immaculately shaped finger- and toenails, puffed on the powder, applied the blow-dryer to her gleaming golden hair.

She switched off the machine, listened. Had the phone been ringing? It jingled again like a cat's meow.

She eased off the plush comforter-draped wicker chair with a crackling, creaking, squeaking, and shuffled on her heels to the telephone. She lifted the receiver gingerly, with fingers spread. "Yes, who is it?"

"Miss Haines," the male voice stated-asked. It was a familiar tone: low but light. Almost sensual. Almost Neal Allen's tone.

"Yes, what is it?" She was tired and wanted to forget about the entire day.

"This is Mr. Allen's cousin. Could you come down to the Medical Center? As soon as possible? He's being packed in ice right now — it won't be long. He gave me your number." There was no hint of concern or sorrow. The words marched dutifully.

"Oh, no," she mumbled. "Oh, God, we were just walking. I didn't know he was so...."

"Don't take the blame," he interrupted. "He did this to himself. He has always found it hard to obey orders." Again, a feeling of obligation seemed to waft from the receiver.

"Yes, I'll be there," she heard herself finally say. "Give me about thirty

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minutes." She slowly replaced the receiver. No time for makeup, or elaborate rites with the electric curlers. She flapped her hands. This was only another occasion that required her body. Her bones, her skin, her hair. But this was no time for haute couture.

Crystal was directed by the admitting desk to the proper Oncology ward, and from there to the appropriate echoing corridor that smelled of cold, sterility, and defeat. Only in the intermittent cluttered waiting areas, where bleary-eyed family members kept vigils, was there a quality of defiance. Crystal avoided returning the haggard stares that followed her long-legged strides.

She was dressed in an old lavender pantsuit. Her hair was fastened in a low ponytail. She quickly inspected herself in a fleeting reflection that flashed through the glass plating of a large lab window.

She noted the numbers until she found the designated room. It was situated in what appeared to be a makeshift extension to the hospital wing. At least there was an aura of anomaly about the personnel and visitors. She noted several chatty youths and children, some bald, all in bright new pajamas and robes, sitting in wheelchairs or in the arms of parents. Leukemia victims also, Crystal deduced. They seemed different, somehow, from Neal Allen; less fey, more cheerful.

She paused uncertainly before Neal Allen's solid, acrylic white door. To the left was a hospital cart. Its three aluminum and chrome shelves were lined with stacks of hospital gowns and masks. To the right was a large plastic basket — inside it were discarded masks and gowns.

A nurse suddenly stepped beside her. "Can I help you?" she asked with undiguised annoyance. She was chubby, dressed in a blue and white tunic and white slacks, and was minus the traditional cap.

"I, uh, want to see Neal Allen. His cousin just phoned me."

"Wait here." She bent and drew out a gown, slipped it on, tied the top strings behind her neck. Then she hid her acne-scarred face behind a mask, cursing lowly as she tangled her hair with the cloth knots. Her eyes remained. Floating alone, they revealed a kinder character, weary and dedicated. She slipped quickly into the room.

Crystal gaped at the closing door and waited.

The nurse reappeared, removed the mask. "He's in reverse isolation. They have him in ice. He's conscious but not very coherent. He may or may not know you. Here...." She tossed her own outfit into the basket, and shook out another set. Crystal was quickly arrayed, carefully fastening the mask herself. The heat of her own breathing was stifling.

She handed her purse to the nurse and entered.

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It was a dreary sight. Two female physician's assistants were working over the swaddled body. The bed was flat and painted white. Aluminum racks on either side of the patient dangled plastic bags of blood and bottles of a clear solution that dripped down through plastic tubes into hollow needles buried in and taped to the youth's upturned arms. At the foot of the bed stood a man swathed in the same hospital garb. His shoulder-length, rich-looking blue-black hair was combed loosely off his forehead, His dark eyes were intent on the activity before him.

Crystal moved to his side, cleared her throat, mumbed a self-introduction into the cloth.

In the amber light of the one lamp attached to the youth's headboard, Neal Allen's cousin rotated his sable stare and fastened it on Crystal Haines.

"Can he see me?" she asked, unnerved by the man's perusal. His eyes were like obsidian — glossy and full of hidden depths. His complexion, she realized with a shock, was as pallid as the supposed victiom's. "Should I just go over to the bed?" Were the cousin's ear tips pointed? She tried not to notice. Flustered, she lowered her eyelids.

"Yes," came the muffled answer. "Go, if you wish. It was not my idea to bring you here. I called you at his request, which I could not refuse. It is an act of desperation on his part. He is beyond the satisfaction of a beautiful woman." He turned again to his straightforward watch like a royal guard.

Crystal shuddered. The man was almost radiating cold. She glanced at him once more, and made for the bedside.

One of the assistants moved to the rear but kept near.

"Neal," she whispered to the seeming corpse. He was shivering, his lips were purple-gray. Facial veins and tiny arteries, some hemorrhaging, seemed a chaos of scattered threads preserved in transparent flesh. The sheets that covered and wrapped the emergency ice were becoming dark and wet. She leaned close to his ear, pulled an ice pack a little off his forehead. "Neal Allen," she whispered again.

The gossamer, bluish lids quivered, the lashes vibrated. He seemed to draw a deep breath, and then opened his eyes. He slid them to the side and focused like a bird on her upper face.

She felt herself smiling with relief behind the mask. "I'm here," she said more loudly, "like I promised."

"Crys-tal Haines...." Her last name came with his exhalation, like a sigh. He gulped air, she stroked his cheek with the backs of her fingers. "You...." he gasped, "... you ... are ... mine ... forever...." His blue-green irises grew dull and seemed to slide up to meet his sinking black lashes. He rolled his chin away from her.

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She froze. Her freshly painted pink nails were incandescent on his soft midnight hair. "What do you mean?" she choked.

But one of the physician's assistants was gently shoving her to the left. She knocked against a blood bag as she stumbled away. The red-stained tube swung crazily. Her stomach plunged.

Neal Allen's cousin grasped her by an elbow and forced her to the opposite end of the room. "He has disobeyed me," he said fiercely but quietly. "It is of no matter now, however."

They both watched as one of the robed and masked assistants suddenly straightened from her ministrations and rushed from the room. "To summon a doctor," the cousin muttered. His grip was icy and strong, but Crystal didn't resist him. After a minute, observing tears blooming in the remaining assistant's eyes, he said, "He has done what he was supposed to do." He released Crystal and stood statuelike, once more staring at Neal Allen's limp form.

Crystal's own burning tears surged furiously. She blotted her nose through the mask and spun to escape from the morbid scene.

She stopped herself abruptly.

In time to prevent a collision with several people who were entering the room. The returning assistant was giving a hurried, brief description of what had transpired, the chubby nurse was tying on yet another mask, and the tall, handsome doctor between them — dressed in a gray business suit — was the palest man Crystal had ever seen.

She sobbed in her breath and darted past them. She tugged open the door.

Once the door shut behind her, she tore off the mask and gown, used them to dry her face, and threw them into the basket. She seized her purse from the aluminum tray, and walked as quickly and elegantly as she could down the corridor to the elevator.

Baby," the smooth voice purred from the telephone, "you've never let me down. You're one of my good girls."

Crystal was sniffling, the tears were rolling into her mouth. "I can't, Ringer, please, I just can't tomorrow." She ripped a white tissue from the box, wiped her nose and mouth.

"Honey, what's wrong? You know I count on you. You've never let me down. The equipment, the set; the whole layout is built around you. It has to be tomorrow, you know that. You know I have some business on Monday."

Crystal was huddled against three pillows that were propped against the wicker curlicues of her headboard. On the end table the digital clock read 11:55 P.M. "I don't want to go anywhere tomorrow," she said more steadily.

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There was silence. Then: "Why don't you want to do this for me, baby?" The inflection no longer coddled.

She almost dropped the phone. "I'm afraid, Ringer," she gurgled.

"Of what? Didn't I tell you I'd take care of you? Didn't I say, you're free with me?"

"Someone died." She played with the bodice lace of her blue-silver nightgown.

"Who?"

"A friend."

"What friend?" The question flashed like a stiletto blade.

Crystal sniffed. "A young man I met a few days ago."

"You're lying to me, honey child."

Crystal wanted to tell him about the whole affair, to hear his easy reassurances. But she'd started badly — he was annoyed now and losing patience. "Listen, Ringer," she explained submissively, "he had some blood disease. It was awful. And his cousin, and the doctor and others I saw in the corridor, they were all so...."

"Look, sweet girl, if you're not in my apartment by 9:00 A.M. tomorrow, you are going to have to attend Vide's special obedience class. I can't tell you how you've upset me. I truly thought you were one of my best ladies."

"But, Ringer, it's only one day. The first time. Please...." She was sobbing again and nearly gagged when she heard the click in the heart of the receiver. There were rumors about the nature of Vide Ring's "obedience class." "Street duty," one of his ex-models had called it; at the time Crystal had only flipped her hair and wondered why the woman slandered dear Vide.

Crystal set the receiver in its cradle.

She was cold. The rear of her neck, her temples, her eyes began to ache. She was nauseated. She quickly shifted off the bed and padded into the living room. Her lustrous gown trailed with a slithery rustle over the lush green carpet. She was making for the kitchen and a midnight snack when suddenly knocking sounded from the apartment's entrance.

Crystal tripped to a stop. *It's Ringer,* she thought in a panic. She turned in one direction, then in another. She clutched sweaty nylon up to her collarbone. Again, a rapping — but it seemed diffident, not Ringer's style.

There were many stories about New York and midnight callers. She tiptoed to the door, and switched on the foyer light. "Yes?" she said evenly. "Who is it?" She peered through the peephole while the answer came.

Crystal shot backward, almost losing her balance. Her brain was swirling.

"It's Neal," repeated the voice. "Can you hear me? You asked me to come."

Her heart pumped, pumped, pumped as she gulped like a fish out

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of water. She whimpered and stepped close to the door once more. "It ... can't be ... you...." Her vocal cords seemed to grate on the words.

"It's O.K., really. I went into remission again. I sank pretty low, that's for sure." He laughed boyishly, dryly.

Crystal became somewhat calmer. She eased loose two bolts and unclipped the chain, stiffly twisted the china knob and pulled, pushed the door behind her.

They stared at one another. He blinked at her nylon-iced thighs, belly, and breasts, she at his normal blue suit and placid, unmarred paleness. She shook her head in disbelief, sending her hair into a shimmery tumble.

Neal Allen advanced and Crystal retreated, the doorknob hard and slippery in her wet palm. He gently caught the door edge and worked it away from her. The catch caught. He punched the lock, fastened the bolts.

"I'm glad you're better." Crystal's hands fisted, her nails dug painfully into the soles of her hands. She shifted in place as he approached her.

"Actually, my ordeal is over. And I am very glad also." He was smiling radiantly as he scanned the apartment's pastel walls, modular furniture, the hanging straw baskets bulging with leafy pothos and spider plants. He walked to the opposite window and closed the batik curtains after quickly studying the neighboring building's sleeping rooms. After a minute he returned his attention to her, as if remembering something. "What did he tell you, when I was unconscious?"

"Who?"

"My cousin. Did he say anything?" He took a step toward her, and halted. His eyes were gemlike, wide and eager.

"Uh, only that you disobeyed him. You're doing that again, aren't you."

"Yes, but there's nothing he can do. They need me. I need you. You're safe with me."

Safe, rich, free, famous: her original boyfriend's spiel; Ringer's, too. Crystal tried to summon an aggressive stance. "Please explain what you are doing here in the middle of the night. I have to get some sleep. And you should be...." She faltered.

He looked saddened. "But you told me I could stay with you."

"I know, I know...." She folded her arms as she tried to think. "You can sleep on the couch. I'll bring you a pillow and blanket. I really don't understand why you can't sleep in the hospital. It's too dangerous...."

"No, not anymore. I explained that." He moved to within a foot of her and tenderly reached, held her by the upper arms.

Crystal trembled, her forerms dropped as if unstrung. His delicate, almost feminine hands seemed carved from ice. "Aren't you still ill?" she whispered.

"I suppose you could call it that. I'm still a guinea pig. There's so much

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we don't understand about ourselves. My elders have a great stake in the future; if one of our kind can walk about during the day, or eat and drink human food, or control and speak with animals, or pull off any number of other tricks, he or she assumes experimental value. It used to be we could only guess about what made us tick. Now we have mortal science to help us discover answers."

"Oh, no," Crystal muttered, shaking her head again. "I'm calling an ambulance."

Neal Allen laughed pleasantly behind closed pink lips. "My dear Crystal Haines, you don't want to do that. You're afraid tonight. You don't want to be alone. He's going to hurt you. Your beauty will be trampled by that master of yours."

"How do you know about him?" Crystal demanded, her eyes round.

"Shhh...." He brought a finger to his mouth and slowly regripped her. "Together, Crystal Haines, the world is ours. Together. We will watch the high and mighty bow at our feet. I want to be your new master. I worship your beauty."

"Don't touch me, let me alone...." Crystal struggled, but only feebly. She quieted. "Together?" she repeated, gazing into his turquoise eyes. "The world is ours?"

Crystal pictured on soaring thoughts men like Ringer cringing before her, kissing the ground at her feet.

"It will feel bad for a time," Neal Allen continued. "You'll seem to sicken and die first...."

Crystal crashed. The lights were smothered in her eyes. A buzzing pulsing exploded in her ears. "You're nuts," she sputtered, "let me go." She twisted in his hands.

An unperturbed Neal Allen slow-winked knowingly. Then he grinned.

Crystal Haines became petrified. She mentally shrieked. *Not the teeth,* she protested to herself.

His were perfect teeth, except for two impossible teeth. But it made sense.

Her sun-fringed eyes narrowed sleekly as he touched each of his shiny needle canines with the tip of his agile tongue. "Will I be beautiful forever," she huskily asked.

His full pink lips kissed hers in a lingering, moist answer. She moaned in pleasure as he drew her against him and nuzzled her beneath her left ear. She gasped and embraced him as he mouthed and kissed her small, exquisite breasts. She groaned as he nibbled and lapped her slender neck. She cried out as he buried his fangs in the soft fragrant flesh of her throat.

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FAR, FAR BELOW

Some years ago, a Hollywood producer suggested that I write a "treatment" that could be turned into a screenplay, concerning a trip to the center of the Earth.

I pointed out that a successful picture had been made on that theme, starring James Mason and Pat Boone. The producer knew about that and pointed out in his turn that the art of special effects had advanced enormously since then, and that a much more spectacular version could now be made.

"One that is scientifically accurate?" I asked.

"Of course," he replied, genially, not really knowing what he was letting himself in for.

So I told him. "In that case," I said, "there can be no journey down long caves; no hollows deep in the Earth; no inner worlds; no underground seas; no dinosaurs; no cavemen. Earth will be pictured as full of matter all the way down, and with temperatures rising into the thousands of degrees."

He wavered and said, doubtfully, "Could you make an interesting story out of that?"

"Sure," I said, with the calm confidence of long experience.

"All right," he said.

So I whomped up a treatment which I thought was very interesting and quite scientific, except for the

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fact that I invented vessels that could bore through solid rock without difficulty and that could remain cool when surrounded by molten iron. (There has to be *some* poetic license.)

I had to fight off attempts to introduce additional nonsense, and just as I was beginning to think there would be an honest picture involving the center of the Earth, the powers that be in Hollywood turned it down with a shudder I could feel in Manhattan.

I suppose that if another voyage to the center of the Earth is done it will involve a hollow Earth; a small, radioactive sun at the center; underground seas; dinosaurs, cavemen, and beautiful actresses in skimpy costumes.

But not with my help!

What made people think that the Earth was hollow, to begin with?

The intial spur may have lain in the existence of caves, some of which are quite large and intricate and were not fully explored. Since the explored portion reached considerable depths, it was easy to suppose caves reached far greater depths in places beyond where anyone had the nerve to explore.

Then, too, the common notion of an underworld, in which the spirits of the dead existed, must have given rise to the notion of a hollow earth, once our planet was accepted as a spherical body. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the greatest literary expression of a hollow Earth with Hell located in the hollow.

Finally, a hollow Earth is a dramatic conception. It makes for interesting stories and gives scope for exciting adventures.

Perhaps the first notable hollow-earth story was that of a Danish writer, Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), who wrote a story, in Latin, called *Nicholas Klim Underground.* It was published in 1741 and was quickly translated into the various European languages. It placed a little sun at Earth's center and described several miniature planets circling, forming a micro-Solar system.

This notion was translated into "science" by one John Cleve Symmes (1742-1814), who maintained that the Earth was not a sphere, but a doughnut. There were large holes at or near the north pole and the south pole, and, presumably, these communicated with each other.

It was safe for Symmes to make this assertion, since in his lifetime, the polar regions of the Earth were still impenetrable mysteries; and no one could check the existence or non-existence of a hole in either

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place. Naturally, Symmes was found to be very convincing by a great many simple souls, for there seems to be a rule that the more foolish an assertion, the more ardently people will believe it. (We know that very well by observing the contemporary world.)

The idea was grist to the mills of science fiction writers. Edgar Allan Poe (1808-1848), in his *A Descent into the Maelstrom,* published in 1842, describes the plight of a ship caught in a gigantic whirlpool in the polar regions. Presumably, the ocean is pouring constantly into the northern Symmes hole. (It is to be hoped that the water makes it way back to the surface elsewhere or the oceans would have been drained long ago.)

Jules Verne (1828-1905) steered clear of holes in the bottom of the sea, but in *A Journey to the Center of the Earth,* published in 1864, the starting point is still in the far north — a volcano in Iceland. Verne's explorers find an ocean in the Earth's interior and see such exotica as giant reptiles, mastodons, and cave-men.

The most recent notable example of hollow-Earth stories were those of Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875-1950). Beginning with *At the Earth's Core,* published in 1922, he wrote a series of stories about Pellucidar (the name he gave the inner world).

And yet, as long ago as 1798, it was entirely obvious that Earth was *not* hollow, and that Symmes was talking through his hat.

In 1798, the English physicist Henry Cavendish (1731-1810) determined the mass of the Earth quite accurately, as roughly 6 sextillion tonnes. The best figure that we now have is 5,976,000,000,000,000,000,000 tonnes. From this, and from Earth's known volume, we can at once determine that the average density of Earth material is 5518 kilograms per cubic metre.

The density of Earth's surface rocks is, however, something like 2600 kilograms per cubic metre, while the density of the ocean is a trifle over 1000 kilograms per cubic metre. If, on top of that, the Earth were hollow, there is simply no conceivable way in which it could have the average density and the total mass that it does have.

To account for Earth's mass, the Earth's interior must not only not be hollow, it must be made up of material that is considerably more dense than the stuff on the surface.

Or look at it in this way. Suppose the Earth had a mass of 6 sextillion tonnes, and all that mass was (in some fashion) concentrated into a

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relatively thin shell about a central hollow. The gravitational field associated with that mass would be so intense that the shell would crumple and crush together into a sphere (or an oblate spheroid if the body were rotating about its axis). Nor could any hollow exist, since the gravitational field would totally erase it.

To be sure, there are caves on Earth, but these are strictly surface phenomena and are trivial irregularities, much like the mountains and valleys that only insignificantly roughen the Earth's smooth oblate sphericity.

Very well, then, we can ignore the madness of pseudo-scientists and the romanticism of science fiction writers and consider the Earth as dense and unhollowed all the way through. The next question is: What is the Earth's interior composed of?

There's no easy answer to that. There's no way we can directly observe the material of the Earth more than a few kilometres below its surface. Even today, we are stymied. We can reach 380,000 kilometres across space and bring back material from the Moon's surface, but we have yet to bore as much as fifteen kilometres into the Earth. To probe down the 6400 kilometres to Earth's center, may remain utterly unlikely for a long, long time to come.

We can, however, make intelligent deductions from observations on Earth's surface. For instance, we know that the Earth's outer crust, which we *can* observe directly, is rocky in nature. The simplest conclusion to which we might come, therefore, is that the Earth is rocky all the way through. The farther down we go, the denser the rock becomes, since a greater and greater weight of overlying rock presses down upon the deeper layers, which are more and more compressed (and therefore denser) in consequence.

However, it is possible to study the response of rocks to the forces of compression. Even though we have only very recently been able to reach (momentarily) compressions of the order of magnitude encountered at the Earth's core, it became clear that rock would not compress sufficiently. If the Earth were rocky through and through, the densities in the interior would simply not be great enough to account for an overall average of 5518 kilograms per cubic metre. Clearly, the Earth's interior must be composed of some material that was denser than rock under zero pressure, to begin with, and that would become even denser at any higher pressure.

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Such a material suggested itself quite early in the game.

In 1600, the English physicist William Gilbert (1540-1603) experimented with a sphere he had shaped out of a magnetic material called "magnetite" or "loadstone" (a naturally-occurring form of iron oxide) and observed the behavior of compass needles in its vicinity. The compass needles behaved exactly as they did in response to Earth's magnetic field, and the obvious conclusion was that the Earth was itself a spherical magnet.

Why should it have magnetic properties, however? The rocks of the Earth's crust are, by and large, non-magnetic, and the exceptional magnetite makes up a very tiny portion of the whole. Suppose, though, that the Earth's interior is solid magnetite. Magnetite has a density, at zero pressure, of about 5200 kilograms per cubic metre, twice that of the common rocks of the crust, and it would be correspondingly denser than those common rocks under the great pressure of Earth's interior. Yet magnetite would still not be dense enough.

Suppose, then, the Earth's interior were a solid mass of iron. That, too, could be magnetic, and the density of iron, at zero pressure, is 7860 kilograms per cubic metre, three times that of the common rocks of the crust. That would be dense enough.

About 1820, scientists accepted the fact that meteorites were bits of solid matter that reached Earth from outer space. When they studied such meteorites, it turned out that there were two chief types. There were "stony meteorites" and "iron meteorites." The former consisted chiefly of substance not very far removed from the materials making up Earth's crust. The latter consisted almost entirely of a mixture of iron and nickel in proportions of nine to one. (Nickel, like iron, has magnetic properties. The mixture would serve as an internal planetary magnet.)

In the 1800's, it was a popular view that the asteroids were the remnants of a planet which had existed in an orbit between those of Mars and Jupiter and which had, for some reason, exploded. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the outer portion of that planet was rocky in nature and the interior portion nickel-iron, and that these two parts were the source of the two types of meteorites.

In 1866, a French geologist, Gabriel August Daubrée (1814-1896), suggested that Earth, too, might have this as its fundamental structure, a rocky exterior wrapped about a nickel-iron interior.

There was more, however, to the Earth's deep interior, than a chemical difference. For one thing, it seemed clear that the Earth's interior

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was a place of heat. Volcanic eruptions were unmistakeable evidence of that. (It was undoubtedly because of volcanic action that the notion arose of Hell as being a place of "fire and brimstone.")

In later times, more subtle evidence of internal heat arose. The vast energies of earthquakes had to be fed by something, and internal heat was the most reasonable source to be suggested. Then, too, many rocks on Earth's surface have crystallized in fashions that seem to have betokened exposore to great temperatures and pressures, presumably because they were deep underground at one time. Futhermore, as human beings dug their mines more and more deeply and observed the results more and more closely, it became clear that temperatures rose steadily with increasing depth.

But where did the heat come from? One theory of the origin of the Earth would have it that the planets of the Solar system were part of the Sun to begin with. The Earth was thought, therefore, to be at the temperature of the Sun to start, and to have cooled with the years. The outer crust cooled sufficiently to solidify, but rock is a good heat insulator, and the interior lost heat only slowly, therefore, and is still hot to this day. Indeed, some scientists tried to estimate the amount of time it would take for the Earth to cool off in this way, and decided that the Earth could only have an age of some tens of millions of years.

This notion of a Sun-born Earth gradually weakened. The mechanical details involved in pulling the planets out of the Sun and establishing them at their present distances and in their present orbits proved an unexpectedly intractable problem. Furthermore, by the 1920's, it became quite clear that the Sun's interior was enormously hotter than its surface, and that gobbets of Sun-stuff would not condense into planets, but would evaporate into space.

A competing theory, originally suggested by the French astronomer Pierre Simon de Laplace (1749-1827) in 1798, was greatly improved and put into a presently-acceptable form in 1944 by the German astronomer Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker (1912-).

The present view, then, is that the Sun, together with the planets, were all formed simultaneously by the gradual coming together of smaller bodies. The Earth's high internal temperature was therefore the result of the conversion of the kinetic energy of all those bodies into heat.

What's more, in the first decade of the 1900's, it was realized that such elements as uranium and thorium, together with isotopes of such more common elements as potassium and rubidium, underwent ra-

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dioactive breakdown and gave off heat in so doing. The heat per kilogram per second was very small, but the total planetary supply is sufficient to give off considerable heat, and this heat continued with only moderate decline over billions of years.

The Earth's interior was therefore not cooling as rapidly as one might expect, and the Earth's age proved to be not 25 million years or so, but 4,600 million years — and this was the age of the Solar system as a whole.

Whatever the source of the Earth's internal heat, or the rate at which it had cooled to the present value, the question remained as to the state of Earth's interior.

The original feeling was that the rise of temperature with depth meant that everything below 80 kilometres had to be molten and fluid, so that the Earth was essentially a huge ball of liquid surrounded by a relatively thin solid crust. This was argued against by the Scottish physicist Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), who pointed out that such a thin solid crust would be impossibly weak and would be quickly broken up by the tidal influences of the Moon and the Sun. As it was, the actual effect of the tides on the Earth's solid surface seemed to show that the Earth, as a whole, was as rigid as steel.

By 1900, then, it was felt that the high temperatures of Earth's interior were neutralized, so to speak, by the high pressures. Although the temperatures were high enough to melt rock and metal at ordinary surface pressure, the increasing pressure with depth kept it all solid, even though the Earth's temperature at its very center was as high as 6000° C. The Earth, in other words, had to be (it appeared) solid throughout.

This turned out to create a problem. In 1895, the French chemist, Pierre Curie, showed that magnetic substances lost their magnetism if temperatures were raised above a certain level (the "Curie point"). For iron, the Curie point is 760° C., and the temperature of the Earth's core is certainly higher than that. It would therefore seem that the core could *not* account for the Earth's magnetism. For a while, that remained a puzzle.

By the time the 1800's were coming to an end, scientists were beginning to study earthquakes in detail and, quite unexpectedly, found a new technique with which to study the Earth's interior.

The first "seismograph" that could usefully serve to detect the waves

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of vibrations set up by earthquakes was invented in 1855 by an Italian physicist, Luigi Palmieri (1807-1896). The device was greatly improved in 1880 by the English geologist John Milne (1850-1913), who established a chain of seismographs in Japan and elsewhere. With him, the modern science of seismology began.

When an earthquake took place, the vibrations were detected by different seismographs at different times, depending upon the distance of each from the focal point of the quake. In this way, one could measure the speed with which earthquake waves travelled through the Earth's crust.

In 1889, the vibrations of an earthquake in Japan were detected 64 minutes later in Germany. Had the waves travelled along the curved surface of the Earth at the speeds they were known to have, they could not possibly have reached Germany in so short a time. The conclusion was that they had taken a short cut, passing in a straight line, more or less, through the Earth's interior.

In 1902, the Irish geologist Richard Dixon Oldham (1858-1936), studying the waves set up by an earthquake in Guatemala, was able to show that the speed at which the waves travelled through the deeper layers of the Earth was slower than that at which they travelled through more shallow layers.

The waves, as they travelled through the Earth, would respond to changing speed with depth by taking up a curved path, sometimes even sharply curved, much as light waves curved and were refracted in passing from air into glass or vice versa, or as sound waves curved in passing through layers of air of different density or temperature.

The curved path taken up by the earthquake waves as they passed through the interior of the Earth, allowed them to reach certain portions of Earth's surface but not others. A "shadow zone" might be created within which the vibrations set up by earthquakes would not be felt, although the vibrations would be felt both closer to, and farther from, the earthquake center than the shadow zone was.

By studying the nature of the shadow zone and the time it took for the earthquake waves to reach different points on the Earth's surface, the German geologist Beno Gutenberg (1889-1960) showed in 1912 that the waves underwent a sudden and pronounced decrease in speed, and a subsequent sharp change in direction, when they penetrated beyond a certain depth. This crucial depth, he determined, was about 2900 kilmetres below the Earth's surface.

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It was a sharp boundary (the "Gutenberg discontinuity") so that the Earth seemed to be divided into two chief regions. There was a central core, a sphere with a radius of 2900 kilometres, which was, presumably, nickel-iron in composition. Around it, making up almost all the rest of the Earth was a rocky "mantle." The sudden sharp change in the speed of earthquake waves as they passed from the mantle to the core, or vice versa, was the best evidence yet of a sharp change in chemical makeup between the two regions.

Within the mantle, and within the core, the waves travelled in gently curved paths, which indicated an increasing density with depth. Thus, from a surface density of 2600 kilograms per cubic metre, the density rises as one probes downward through the mantle until at a depth of 2900 kilometres below the surface, it is about 5700 kilograms per cubic metre. As one moves into the core at that depth, the density rises, suddenly and sharply, to 9700 kilograms per cubic metre and continues to rise until, at the very center of the Earth, it is 13,000 kilograms per cubic metre. Such figures fit the notion of a rocky mantle and a nickel-iron core.

In 1909, meanwhile, a Croation geologist, Andrija Mohorovicic (1857-1936), was studying an earthquake in the Balkans and detected a fairly sharp change in the speed of the waves at a depth of about 30 kilometres below the surface (the "Mohorovicic discontinuity"). Apparently, the rocky mantle had a thin outermost layer usually called the "crust."

Both crust and mantle are composed of rocky substances, but the details of the chemical structure are different. The crust is high in aluminum silicate, for instance, while the mantle (judging from earthquake data, and comparing the speed of the waves through the mantle, and through rocks of various composition under laboratory conditions), is high in magnesium silicate.

But the question of the state of the Earth's interior, solid or liquid, continued to arise. Even into the 1920's, though, the majority opinion was that it was solid.

Not only was it thought that pressure would keep the core solid even at high temperatures, but the new knowledge of radioactivity contributed to the thought. The radioactive substances, uranium, thorium, and so on, were all concentrated in the mantle, perhaps even in the upper layers of the mantle, since compounds of those substances mixed

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more easily with rock than with nickel-iron. It might be, therefore, that the mantle would be hot, but the core might be comparatively cool, even cool enough to keep the iron below the Curie point, and therefore magnetic.

There are, however, two kinds of earthquake waves. Some are "transverse" and vibrate up and down like light waves, moving at right angles to the direction of propagation of the waves. Those are known as "S waves." Others are "longitudinal" and vibrate in and out like sound waves, in the direction of propagation of the waves. Those are "P waves."

Longitudinal waves, such as the P waves, can travel through any kind of matter, solid, liquid or gas. Transverse waves, such as S waves, can travel through solids, or along the surface of liquids, but cannot travel through liquids or gases.

Oldham was the first to note the existence of these two kinds of earthquake waves, and by 1914, it seemed to him that he had never detected S waves passing through the core. He began to suspect, therefore, that the core might be liquid.

Gutenberg, on the other hand, was convinced the core was solid, and his prestige was so high that it wasn't till 1925 that geologists generally were convinced that S waves did not pass through the core. Even then, though, they hesitated to conclude that the core was liquid.

In 1926, the English astronomer Harold Jeffreys (1891-) calculated the rigidity of the mantle from earthquake wave data and showed it to be considerably more rigid than the Earth as a whole (as calculated from tidal data). That meant that the core had to be less rigid than the Earth as a whole and might, therefore, well be liquid. That finally swung opinion to the other side, and from that time on, the notion of Earth's possession of a liquid nickel-iron core was established.

A liquid iron core was certainly above the Curie point, but Earth's rotation could set up swirls in it, and these swirls could produce electromagnetic effects that, Curie point or no, would account for Earth's magnetic field.

Finally, in 1936, a Danish geologist, Inge Lehmann, noted that those P waves which penetrated the core and which passed quite close to the Earth's center, seemed to undergo a sudden small increase in speed. She suggested that there was an "inner core" at the Earth's center that was a sphere with a radius of 1250 kilometres.

How does the inner core differ from the outer core? The general

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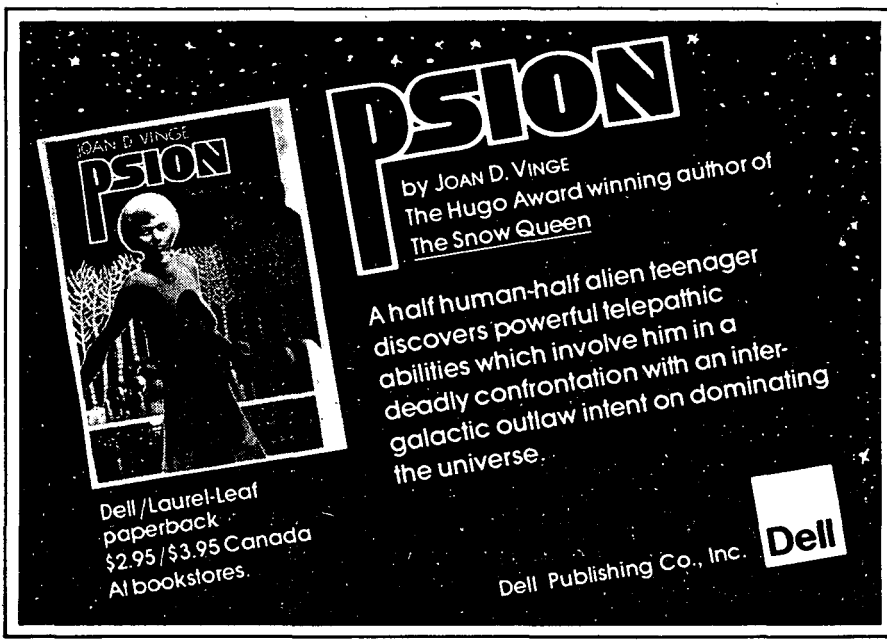
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opinion is that whereas the outer core is liquid, pressures at the very center of the Earth are great enough to solidify the nickel-iron, so that the inner core is solid.

That is where matters stand now, except that there is some argument as to the precise chemical nature of the core. Some maintain that pure nickel-iron may be *too* dense to account for the overall density of the Earth, and that the core must contain a significant amount of oxygen to lower that density. It may be, then, that the core consists of somewhat rusty nickel-iron.

Let me conclude, then, by saying that the solid inner core makes up about 0.8 percent of the Earth's volume; the liquid inner core about 15.4 percent; the rocky mantle about 82.8 percent, and the rocky crust about 1.0 percent.

In terms of mass, the dense metallic core (outer and inner) together make up about one-third of the total mass of the Earth, while the rocky outer layers (mantle and crust) together make up the other two-thirds.

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Damon Knight's first F&SF story was "Not With A Bang," a short piece that appeared in our second issue and eventually became a classic in the field. You are about to begin his latest, and longest, contribution, a thrilling novel about a floating construction called Sea Venture, which is designed as an alternative to colonies in space and is threatened by a menace as alien as anything ever imagined. The novel will be published in book form later this spring by Tor Books.

CV

(1st of 3 parts)

BY

DAMON KNIGHT

1

When Emily Woodruff first saw Sea Venture on a blue November day, her heart jumped, and she said, "It's so big!" Her husband, Jim, who misunderstood her or perhaps understood her in a different way, said reverently, "Nothing but the best," as if he were talking about a new car or a motor home. But none of the brochures had prepared her for this: Sea Venture was incredibly, impossibly big, looming there beyond the heads of the people like some fantastic cloud castle against the sky. The white wall curved up and back; above it were other curves, and beyond them she could see pennants snapping in the sun, and a tall white cylinder with gulls over it.

Jim was sixty-five, a pink-faced man with white hair brushed smoothly back against his skull. They had been married thirty-five years, good years, on the whole. Their children were grown, and they had grandchildren. Last August, Jim had sold his dealership for a sum that took Emily's breath away, and he said, "Let's have a real vacation. Let's run over to Honolulu for a couple of weeks and then take a cruise on Sea Venture."

Now, looking at the height she had to ascend, she said, "Jim, I don't think I can go up there."

"Yes, you by God can," he said in his other voice. Then two white-uniformed young women, one more beautiful than the other, were helping them onto the moving ramp, and up they went into the sky, like children on a Ferris wheel. When they got to the top, two other young women ushered them into a carpeted

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lobby, perfumed, echoing with voices. They got into a line that ended at a desk where a uniformed man took their tickets and turned them over to another man, brown-skinned and white-jacketed, who smiled and said, "Please follow me, Mr. and Mrs. Woodruff." They went down a softly lit blue corridor to an elevator that bore them up smoothly, and paused, and sighed into stillness. Then another blue corridor that led them to a paneled door; the brown man opened it, bowed them in, and handed Jim the keys. "Welcome to Sea Venture," he said. "Your luggage will be up shortly. I hope you will have a very pleasant voyage."

Emily turned slowly. The room was smaller somehow than the pictures had led her to expect. The walls were papered in a blue-and-cream floral pattern; the carpet was royal blue. There were twin beds with quilted covers, and a window through which she could see the boarding area and the brown-hazed skyline of Waikiki beyond it. At the far end of the room was a desk with a computer terminal and a wall screen.

Jim Woodruff was moving nervously around the room, hands in his pockets. "Why don't you take a little nap?" he said. "I'm going to go down and see what's what."

He paused at the door. "Is that all right?"

"Of course, Jim," she said.

When he was gone, Emily stood without moving for a moment, then roused herself to look into the closet. There was a little refrigerator, and there were plenty of hangers, including some nice padded ones. She hung up her jacket, then inspected the bathroom: tub, shower, toilet, and a curious thing she supposed must be a bidet — she had never seen one. Towels neatly folded.

She went back into the room and sat experimentally on one of the beds. On the wall beside her was a panel with push buttons marked STEWARD, MAID, TV, MUSIC, AIR CONDITIONING, WINDOW. Did the window open? She pushed the button, and the window went black, as if a weightless curtain had descended over it instantly and silently. She was frightened, and pushed the button again; the blue sky reappeared. Then she realized how foolish she had been. The "window" was only a cleverly recessed 3-D television screen. She remembered the great, curving, unbroken white wall they had seen from the boarding ramp: there were no windows in Sea Venture.

Emily looked at the blue carpet between her feet. It was really very nice, she told herself, this little room in which she was to spend the next three months of her life.

2

At his desk in the Control Center of Sea Venture, the chief of operations,

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Stanley Bliss, was watching the embarkment in the bank of television screens. Bliss was a Cunard veteran, fifty-three years old, a portly man with pale blue eyes. He had been lured away to Sea Venture, somewhat against his better judgment, by a large advance in salary and a stupendous retirement plan. Part of the understanding was that he would become an American citizen; he didn't mind that, and he didn't mind the more or less permanent separation from his wife in Liverpool. What he did mind was the sheer infuriating complexity of the job he had taken on. On Sea Venture he wasn't called "captain," and he wasn't a captain; he was the chief executive of an operation involving anywhere from nine hundred to fifteen hundred employees at any given moment. In theory and in fact, he was responsible for the safety of the vessel (which was safe as houses), but also he was indirectly in charge of the chefs, the bakers, the electronic crew, the maintenance department, the stewards, the publicity office and the newspaper, the entertainment staff; and as if that were not enough, he was ex officio a member of the Executive Council that more or less ran Sea Venture, or tried to run it, with its all-day monthly meetings and the endless committees in between, and the stockholders' meetings, and the work sessions, and the planning sessions, and my God, the initiatives and referenda....

The passengers he was seeing today were the usual lot, some of them San Francisco people reboarding after the layover in Honolulu, others boarding here for the first time, burnt red or brown, with flowered shirts and leis — a little more geriatric perhaps than the old *Queen;* the largest number were couples in their fifties and sixties, with a scattering up to eighty — blue-haired women tottering on canes (heaven knew why they wanted to go on a cruise; they never left their cabins except for meals, and two or three never came out at all); then there was a sizable group in their forties, taking up most of the seats in the bars; then the "younger crowd," twenties and thirties, who flocked together and were visible out of all proportion on the dance floor, the tennis courts, and so on; then a forlorn sprinkling of teenagers glumly following their parents about. It was impossible to know how they had been attracted to Sea Venture in the first place; once you got them, you had to keep them busy, entertained; give them the illusion, at least, that they were having a marvelous time.

In another bank of screens, he could see see the permanent residents boarding at the stern, nine hundred feet away. Their ramp went up to the loading area on the Sports Deck; it was an insult to the integrity of the hull to have the passenger entrance so low, but that was not the only compromise the designers had made.

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Bliss turned to the guest beside him. "Well, what do you think of us so far?"

Captain Hartman smiled noncommittally around his pipe. He was another ex-Cunard man, retired now, traveling on a courtesy pass. "Impressive," he said.

"The size, you mean. She is the largest passenger vessel ever built, let alone the biggest submersible vessel — or ever likely to be built, if you ask me."

"You don't think they'll go on with the program? You're meant to be a prototype, aren't you? Isn't that what the *P* in POSH is for?"

Bliss grimaced slightly. "Prototype Open Sea Habitat, yes; somebody must have thought that was funny once, but not anymore. We call her Sea Venture, or CV for short. What she is is a bloody raft."

"Boarding completed, Chief," said the first deputy, a handsome Midwesterner named Ferguson.

"All right. Signal the tugs."

"How many tugs?" Hartman inquired.

"Six. They'll take us out about seventy miles, until we can catch the southbound current; then we're on our own. Tugs brought her all the way across the Pacific four years ago from the Kure Yards, where she was built. The hull, that is; the fittings and interior work are all American."

"You're proud of her, really, aren't you? I should be."

"Oh, well, you know," said Bliss. He was watching a screen on the console in front of him, the one that displayed a view of the reception lobby. Following his gaze, Hartman saw a passenger, an alert-looking young man with short dark hair, turn as he moved toward the desk and look directly into the camera.

His real name was Sverdrupp. He was born in Stockholm; educated in France, Germany, and England; trained in Israel and Central America. At the moment he had an American passport. For the past ten years, he had been employed by a certain international organization that gave him occasional jobs to do and paid him very well. Two months ago he had been summoned to a meeting in Rome, in the course of which it appeared that he was being loaned to another organization, not named then or ever, which required his services for this occasion only. His body was deceptively slender; his clothes were new and expensive. He had a boyish, open face, useful to him in his profession.

John Stevens, as he called himself now, looked around him with calm interest while the moving ramp carried him up into Sea Venture. He did not see the man he was looking for, but he did see several other celebrities: the video star Eddie Greaves, a former U.S. senator, a beer baron, the widow of a Greek shipping magnate. There were also several very pretty girls.

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Stevens knew that his quarry had reserved a suite on the Signal Deck at the top of Sea Venture; he himself had booked a single cabin on the deck below, in a section that gave him privileges at the restaurant used by more exalted passengers. He rode decorously up into the reception lounge, presented his ticket, and a followed a Filipino steward to his cabin. He investigated it, sniffed the air, put his hand on the sweating side of the ice-water carafe, then sat down before the computer console at the far wall.

In the printer tray beside it was a little newsheet, the *CV Journal*. "WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SEA VENTURE!" it began, and went on, "If you would like to know some fascinating facts about Sea Venture, press the *CV* button on your personal computer terminal." He did so, and found to his satisfaction that there was a program for deck plans.

On the wall screen a skeletal outline of the vessel appeared in 3-D. It rotated gently at his command, and he saw that the view he had had from the island, huge as it was, had given him a misleading impression. Seen from above, Sea Venture was an oval shape more than three-quarters as wide as it was long, wider than eight ordinary ships lying side by side.

He gave the computer another command, and saw a red dot with the legend *YOU ARE HERE*. He summoned up other dots for the Liberty Restaurant, the Signal Deck Lounge, the card room, the casino, the theater; the computer obligingly drew yellow lines from his cabin to each one. He blanked the screen, well satisfied. Then he turned on a commercial channel and sprawled in comfort against the headboard of the bed to watch "Wild Annie and Bill."

3

A powered wheelchair approached the moving ramp at the stern of Sea Venture, under the sign that read *PERMANENT RESIDENTS ONLY*. In the chair was a very small gray-haired man; behind it was a large young man with an expressionless corn-fed face. As they entered the ramp, a young woman in a yellow pantsuit ran up beside them. "Professor Newland, I'm Ann Bonano of the *Toronto Star*."

"No interviews," barked the large young man.

"No, that's all right, Hal," Newland said in a surprisingly resonant voice. "I know Ms. Bonano — we met at the convention in Los Angeles, what was it, four years ago?"

"I didn't think you'd remember," she said, smiling. "Professor Newland, it's funny to find you here, and even funnier to find you going into the permanent resident section. Surely this doesn't mean—"

"No, no," said Newland, "just trying to make your job harder. Sneaking aboard, to put it bluntly. How did you know I was here?"

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"I was having lunch with a friend and forgot the time, and then I was in such a hurry that I got out at the wrong gate — and I looked up and saw you. One of the breaks." She took a notebook out of her yellow bag. "As long as I've trapped you, why are you here? Have you changed your opinion about Sea Venture and the ocean habitat program?"

"No, not exactly, but I thought it would be educational. You know."

She hesitated. "Professor Newland, let me put it another way. Our people in Washington tell us the space colony bill is going to be voted down again this year by a substantial margin. Does that mean you think it's time to give up? Do you see the ocean habitats as a viable alternative to L-5?"

"I wouldn't put it that way," Newland said easily. "You know, this year or next, it doesn't matter, we've got to go into space. The L-5 colonies are going to be built, there's no doubt about that; the only question is when."

She scribbled a note. "But in the meantime," she said, "if Congress continues to fund the ocean habitat program, don't you think that will make them less and less inclined to give you any money for L-5?"

"We'll have to wait and see. I think Congress usually does the right thing, sonner or later. I know you've followed my lectures, and I don't have to tell you what the reasons are. By going into space we'll be opening up brand-new territory, not just using up more of what we've already got. And not only that, we'll be gaining vast new sources of energy. That's vital. We've got to have the energy, for 6 billion people. And you can't get that energy from the ocean."

"Some people are talking about thermal plants along the habitat lanes."

"Well, that's what I like to call a deep-blue-sea project."

She made another note. "Professor Newland, there have been rumors for over a year now of some kind of split between you and the rest of the L-5 leadership. Is there anything to those rumors?"

"We've had our disagreements over the years. That's not surprising."

She paused. "You said you thought this trip on Sea Venture would be educational. What do you hope to learn?"

"Who knows? I'm always ready to learn something new. Talk to me again after Guam, and maybe I'll tell you."

"You're getting off at Guam, then, and flying back?"

"Yes."

"What are your plans then?"

"No plans. I'll do whatever needs doing."

She put her notebook away; they were almost at the top of the ramp. "Thank you very much, Professor Newland. I hope you have a pleasant voyage."

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The open-decked boarding area was crowded with people greeting each other, exchanging packages, running back and forth. There seemed to be a good deal of hugging and kissing. A smiling Chinese steward came toward them through the hubbub. "Follow me, please, Professor Newland, and we'll get you into the passenger section without any trouble."

They had gone only a yard or two when a large brown man put his hand on the arm of the wheelchair. "Professor Newland, I couldn't help overhearing on the ramp. It's an honor to have you with us. I'm Ben Higpen, the mayor. Here's my phone number. Give me a call anytime, and I'll be glad to show you around."

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Higpen."

"My pleasure."

Only a few people stayed to watch Sea Venture slip away from her moorings, fussed at by four little tugs that churned the deep blue, almost purple water of the harbor. There was no band playing, and no one waving from the decks — no place to wave from. When Sea Venture was far enough away from the dock, two more tugs joined her amidships. The vessel slowly rotated, revealing her true size for the first time. Two tall white cylinders, only one of which had been visible before, towered against the sky. Slowly and steadily the vessel moved away from the island, out toward the bright horizon and the horror that awaited her.

4

Humming beerily to himself, Jim Woodruff unlocked the stateroom door and entered. His wife was sitting in one of the overstuffed chairs with her hands in her lap; to look at her, you would think she hadn't moved. "Em," he said with forced enthusiasm, "you won't believe this place. They've got movie theaters here, and a turkish bath, and a shopping mall— What's the matter?"

"Nothing, dear, I'm fine."

"Well, you're tired. That's natural." He took a turn around the room, jingled the keys in his pocket, sat on the bed. "I met a nice guy in a bar — he's from Akron, he's in real estate there. We're going to have a great time, Em."

"I am tired, but I'll be all right after a while."

"Sure you will. You'll have plenty of time to rest. Did you have a nice nap?"

"I couldn't, but I will later. What was his name, the man from Akron?"

"Boyko, Bill Boyko. He gave me his card. A real nice guy. You know, Em, you wouldn't believe the clothes on some of the women you see here. I mean, fur coats, high heels, Arab pants, you name it. Talk about the Ritz, this is it. You want something from room service?"

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"I don't think so. There're a lot of things in the refrigerator, in there."

"Yeah?" Jim rose and went to see for himself. Cold beer, soft drinks, fruit juice, sandwiches in plastic, cheese. He took a beer and came back. "Pretty soft," he said. "This is the life, Em, wait and see."

"Attention," said a voice. "Attention, all passengers. A boat drill will be held in five minutes. Please consult the card posted on your stateroom door to find your boat station, or ask any steward for assistance. When the alarm bell sounds, all passengers are requested to go to their stations."

Jim got up and looked at the card on the inside of the door. "Lifeboat 37," he read. "Guess we'd better go."

"What does that mean, a boat drill?" Emily was sitting up with her hands clasped tightly together.

"It just means we have to go to our lifeboat, find out where it is, and so on, so we'll know in case of an emergency. It's a routine thing, Em; they do it on every ship."

"But what do you mean, an emergency? The ship isn't going to sink, is it?"

"Of course the ship isn't going to sink. My God, Em, how could it sink, a thing this size? Be reasonable, will you?"

Her voice went high and thin. "But if it isn't going to sink, why do they have lifeboats?" She jumped when a bell began ringing in the corridor outside.

Jim clanked his beer can on the table and got up. "I haven't got time to argue with you now. Are you coming or not?"

"No," she said. "No, you go, Jim. I can't."

"All right, then, dammit."

At the door he took another look at the diagram on the card. Boat 37, it was on the port side of the Boat Deck near the stern; that should be easy.

The bell was still ringing. He got on the elevator with a bunch of other people who had a slightly embarrassed holiday air. They glanced at him and at each other with little smiles, as if to say, "This is really ridiculous, but isn't it fun?" Their spirit began to infect him, and by the time they got down to the Boat Deck, he was feeling a lighthearted excitement.

It was easy to find Lifeboat 37, because nearly the whole crowd was going there. The number was on a sign over one of two massive doors that opened off a kind of deep alcove. Stewards were waiting to help them over the sill. At the end of a short passageway was an open door in a white curving wall; they walked in and found themselves in a long room lined on either side with blue-cushioned seats. Up in front was a pilot's chair and a console, with television screens and three round windows.

One of the stewards was standing up in front with a clipboard in his hand; he was Chinese by the look of him, but he spoke English like any-

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body else. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you will sit down and give me your attention please, I will call off your names in alphabetical order." They shuffled down the aisle, sorting themselves out. The seats were only about two-thirds filled.

"Abbott, Mr. and Mrs.?"

"Here."

The steward went down his list. There was no reply to many of the names he called, and he shook his head disapprovingly when he was through. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, I want to call your attention to the features of your lifeboat. In the unlikely event of an emergency requiring us to abandon Sea Venture, the alarm would sound and you would all come immediately to this station. In that event, I hope we would have better attendance than we had today." There was a little embarrassed laughter.

"When all our passengers are aboard," the steward went on, "the door would be closed and the lifeboat launched by pulling this red handle. The boat can also be launched electronically from the Control Center provided the door is closed and sealed. As you can see, the lifeboat is completely enclosed and can be launched whether or not Sea Venture is submerged. If it is launched from a submerged position, the lifeboat will automatically rise to the surface and begin to broadcast a location signal. When it is on the surface, if conditions permit, the hatch that you see overhead can be raised. Food sufficient for ten days is stored in the lockers overhead. Other supplies, including first-aid kits and life preservers, are also stored there. Are there any questions?"

"What happens after we get to the surface?" someone called.

"In the event of abandoning Sea Venture near the mainland or an inhabited island, the lifeboat will be navigated to safety. Otherwise the lifeboat will be picked up by a rescue vessel. Are there any other questions?" He waited a moment. "Very well, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your courtesy and patience. The boat drill is now over. Thank you."

They all trooped out, laughing and talking.

5

The perm section, Newland discovered, was very much different from the passenger area. Higpen met them at the entrance and walked beside Newland's chair while Hal, silent as usual, walked behind. The corridors here were wider, and they were tiled, not carpeted; the apartments — they were not called staterooms — had draped windows looking out on the corridors; there were brass knockers on the doors. There was a fountain in the big central square — it was not called a lobby — and trees growing in tubs under the bright twenty-foot ceiling, and there was a playground

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with children in it. Higpen, obviously proud of his domain, showed them the church and the synagogue, the theater, the school, the dairy, the goat and pig farm. The animals were in neat enclosures; they came running to look at Newland and sniff his fingers. There were rabbits, too, and poultry.

There were many children, more than Newland had expected. There were Boy Scouts and Girl Scout and Sea Scouts; there was a 4-H club. Everywhere they went, friendly people came up to talk to them.

Higpen took them to see the hydroponics farm, where endless ranks of plants grew sturdy and green from tanks of nutrients: beans, peas, squash, tomatoes, onions, beets. There were long rooms full of dahlias, carnations, lilies of the valley. "We supply all the fresh vegetables and all the cut flowers for the restaurants in the passenger section," Higpen said proudly. "All this green stuff helps with the air recycling when we're submerged, too. We get four crops a year. No pests, no scale, no rust. Even the chemicals we use, a lot of them come straight out of the ocean."

Next he took them to see the fishery. Newland could not go into the pressurized area because of his heart problem, but he was able to watch on television screens. He saw workers standing beside a vast trough surging with green water, from which nets brought up silvery flopping masses of fish, some bigger than a man.

"Those there are tunnies," Higpen said. "Good eating. Those little ones, they're trash fish, but we grind them up for fish meal and fertilizer. This is our big cash crop; we process and freeze about three hundred tons a year, over and above what we eat ourselves. We process krill, too, a kind of plankton, and make fish paste out of it. You may have heard that the Pacific is a desert; well, don't believe it. You could make soup out of this seawater."

From the fishery they went to Higpen's neat apartment, where they met a friend of his, Yetta Bernstein, a stocky gray-haired woman. "What would you like?" she asked. "A glass of beer? Some wine?"

"I'd like a soft drink, if you have one."

She brought him a 7-Up; Hal accepted a beer. "Ben, and Yetta," Newland asked, "how close is Sea Venture to being self-sustaining?"

Higpen shrugged. "Not very. It's the passenger money that supports us — the profit from that is about $12 million a year. Part of that goes into amortizing the investment, along with the government subsidies, and the rest is paid to stockholders."

"The perms are the stockholders?"

"Some of them are. Some just lease space here, and we've even got a few renters — people trying it out to see if they like it. If we didn't have the passenger operation, no, we couldn't

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come near to paying our own way. We take in about six hundred thousand dollars a year from the fishery, and another five hundred thousand from the farms and gardens, but that's a drop in the bucket."

"How many people are employed in the fishery, farms, and gardens?"

"About two hundred, in the winter."

"And you've got a permanent population of around two thousand? What do the rest of them do?"

Yetta Bernstein said, "They do all the things you'd expect people to do in a town of two thousand. We have a dentist, two lawyers, a bank, and an insurance company. We have the people who own grocery stores and run the movie theater, and so on. Ben owns a hardware store, and I run a book outlet."

"But then you're all taking in each other's washing?"

"No, not altogether," Higpen said patiently. "We've got a lot of people here who are bringing in outside income. Several data base firms, for instance. We've got a guy who writes novels; you probably never heard of him, but he makes a living at it, and that money comes into the economy. We've got a very successful investment advisory service. They do their business by satellite data link, just like they would if they were ashore, and their people can stop off in Manila and Taipei and Tokoyo to see for themselves what's going on, and the travel doesn't cost them anything."

"Even so."

Higpen nodded. "Even so, we're not self-sustaining, let alone self-sufficient. Sea Venture is a prototype. To make it really work economically, we'd have to have a population of at least a million."

"Do you think that will come?"

"Oh, I have mornings when I think it will. There are all kinds of plans and schemes. The one I like best is a flat construction that rides on the surface or just below it. It covers acres; it's a flexible assembly of linked modules, so it just rides along like a raft of seaweed. Solar cells covering all that area — there's plenty of sunlight out here. It wouldn't need the passenger service, it wouldn't have to make any scheduled stops, it would just keep going around the gyre, around and around."

"That's a lovely word, *gyre.* It reminds me of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* or that poem of Yeats's — 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre....' "

Higpen nodded soberly. "This is the big one we're in, the North Pacific Gyre, but there are smaller ones you could get into if you wanted to. There's one north of the Hawaiian Islands, for instance. Or you could ride back and forth on the North Equatorial Countercurrent."

Newland looked at him curiously. "This is your dream, isn't it?"

"Sure. Sometimes when I wake up

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in the morning, before I open my eyes, I've been dreaming about it and I think I'm there."

Back in his room, Newland looked at the menu: there it was, an appetizer, "Pâté de Krill." He ordered it, and it was delicious.

How could any man discover his own motives, or confront them honestly if he found them? Was it merely the fact that he was now too ill to go into space, the certain knowledge that he would never get there alive, that had made him begin to doubt the L-5 program to which he had given thirty years of his life? Or, to go farther back, was it the coincidence of his name that had turned him unconsciously toward thoughts of space colonization in the first place? He had known many such coincidences. Was it the fact that his own life seemed to him to have taken on a gentle descending arc, now in his seventh decade, that had made him wonder if, after all, there might be something to be done here on Earth?

He knew the arguments, for and against. He had used those arguments, in lectures and debates, too long and too often to put any great value on them. He knew how easy it was, and how necessary, to convince oneself first in order to persuade other people. He had been a scientist long before he became an advocate, and he still had the habit of skepticism toward unproved ideas, his own most of all.

Then there was the logic of events. The first prototype ocean habitat was here; it had cost $2 billion to build, less than three-tenths of a percent of the most optimistic estimate for the first L-5 colony — and that would have been only the beginning. Back and forth he went: Yes, the benefits of a space colony would have paid back the original investment many times over by now. But there was no space colony, and Sea Venture was here.

6

After Newland's morning bath, Hal Winter carried his frail body back to the hospital bed and began to work on his legs, contracting and straightening them. "Feeling O,K,?" he asked.

"Not too bad."

To distract himself from the pain, Newland thought about the fax last night from Marcia Sonnabend, the public relations director of L-5, Inc., in New York City. "A good many questions here," she had written, "about the recent story in the *Toronto Star,* which has been picked up by wire services here and abroad. I send faxes of stories from the *New York Times, Washington Post,* and *Los Angeles Herald Examiner.* At the board meeting Monday, there were suggestions that this publicity is damaging to our position and that it should be counteracted soonest. Please give me your thoughts on this. John Howard of the

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Times, who has always been sympathetic, is willing to do a telephone interview at your earliest convenience; *Time* and *Newsweek* are also interested. If you would like to go ahead with this, please let me know so that we can set up times."

One of the stories had been headlined: L-5 GURU WAVERING IN FAITH?

The steward brought in their breakfast: oatmeal and toast for Newland; scrambled eggs, sausage, hashbrowns, and fried tomatoes for Hal. "What time is it in New York now?" Newland asked when they were finished.

"Quarter after one."

"They'll be out to lunch. Let's try in a couple of hours."

Hal carried him back to bed, and Newland sat up with a book on oceanography, not quite seeing the pages. After all, what was he going to tell her? If he gave an interview with all the old ringing declarations in it, would anybody believe them? Did he believe them himself? Newland honestly did not know. He was attracted by the simplicity of the perms, their quiet enthusiasm for Sea Venture. There was a striking difference between them and the space colony enthusiasts: the perms lacked the mountain climbing mystique, the fanaticism; they were simple small-town people whose town happened to be afloat on the Pacific.

He heard Hal talking quietly in the other room; presently he came in and handed Newland the phone. "She's on the line."

"Hello, Marcia? How are you?"

"Hello, Paul," said her clear voice. "You sound as if you're just around the corner. How's it going?"

"Oh, all right," said Newland. "I've been getting the grand tour. It's very interesting, but I may have overdone it a little. Marcia, I'm afraid I'm just not up to any phone interviews right now."

"I understand," her voice said after a moment.

"Will you tell the news people that I'll be in touch when I'm feeling stronger, say in a week or so?"

"Of course, Paul. Look, how would this be? Let me put together a statement and fax it over to you tomorrow morning. Just something to keep the wolves at bay. All right?"

"Yes, fine."

"O.K.," she said. "Here's Olivia, she wants to talk to you."

Olivia Jessup was L-5's managing director, an old friend. Her voice was scratchy and thin. "Paul, I'm sorry to hear you're not feeling up to snuff. I won't keep you, but I just want to you to know that Bronson and a couple of the others are making a stink."

"That's normal," said Newland.

"Yes, but it's serious, Paul. Bronson is politicking to get you voted out. What he'd really like is to expel you from the organization."

"I know," he said.

"All right. Do what you think best,

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but don't wait too long. Good-bye, dear."

Newland gave the phone back to Hal and put his book aside, not pretending to read anymore. There was a sour taste in his mouth; he was tired of all the maneuvering, the speeches; the true things that had somehow lost their truth over the years. When had it started to go wrong?

The tickle of uneasiness had begun before he was really aware of it, maybe as long as five years ago. In the beginning they had all been starry-eyed together, a great bunch, wonderful people, brothers and sisters. And now the L-5 habitats were still drawings on paper turning yellow around the edges; what they had instead was the Manned Orbital Vehicles, MOVs, armed with laser weapons.

Maybe that was always the way it had to be. The military, first in Germany, then in the United States and the Soviet Union, had supported rocket research through the long difficult years. You had to take the money, because you couldn't get it anywhere else. If you wanted to make spaceships, you did what they wanted and kept your eye on the ultimate goal.

An old rhyme came into his head. The rockets go up, the rockets come down. "Dot's not my department," says Wernher von Braun.

7

When she had had a few days to get over her nervousness, Emily began to feel almost at home in Sea Venture. A little newspaper, the *CV Journal,* was waiting for them in the printer tray every morning, and several times there were letters as well. As Jim said, the size of the room didn't matter — after all, they used it only to sleep, and there were so many other places to go, so many things to do. They met a very congenial couple, the Prescotts, in the lounge one day, and afterward spent a good deal of time with them.

After a week or so, Jim found some card-playing companions, and then she did not see so much of him. Emily went to the health spa and to several lectures, which she found very interesting. She began to take lessons in origami and flower arrangement from Mrs. Oruma, who owned the Oriental Shoppe — "the gook nook," as Jim called it.

There was only one more really bad time before the horror began: the morning when the newspaper had an announcement on the first page about a temporary submersion. "In order to move into a more favorable current, Sea Venture will submerge to a depth of approximately three hundred feet at 1 A.M. tomorrow, and will remain submerged for approximately seven hours. The submersion will be carried out during the night in order to cause the least inconvenience, but passengers who are up at that hour will be able to

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watch the procedure on lounge, Promenade Deck, and stateroom screens."

"Jim, I don't want to submerge," she said.

"It has to, to get into a favorable current. It says so right here. Besides, you knew all about that before you came."

"Yes, but I thought it wouldn't be until we got to those islands."

"Well, what's the difference, now or later? Pull yourself together, Emily."

But she couldn't do it. She went to bed early that night, and turned off the window: even that dreadful blackness was better than watching the ocean come up over their heads. She took two pills instead of one, but they did not make her sleep, they only turned her head fuzzy.

In the Control Center, Captain Hartman sat beside Bliss just before one o'clock, watching Deputy Womack at the console. The radioman — the communications coordinator, they called him — was at the other end of the console, watching a bank of screens and occasionally talking quietly into a mouthpiece.

"I'm really interested to see this," said Hartman. "To me, that's the most amazing thing about Sea Venture — submerging a thing this size. It's never been done before, I know. To tell the truth, I'm not certain why it's necessary."

"Well, it's a good thing in storms, you know, but the real reason is for steering. All we've got is wind and currents, and that's enough, if you don't mind taking ten months to go round the Pacific. But the currents change from one season to another, and they're always tricky east of the Marianas. If we want to get to Manila and not wind up somewhere in the Carolinas, we've got to make some northing."

"Can you really do that, just by adjusting your depth?"

"Oh, absolutely. It's the Coriolis force. Whatever current you're in, in this hemisphere, there's always another one underneath going off to starboard."

"So if you ran too far to the north, you'd be out of luck?"

"That's about it. That's why they pay us our money, eh, Womack?"

The young deputy turned and smiled. "Yes, sir."

"Here we go, then. All secure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take her down to minus three hundred."

Womack tapped keys on the console. "Watch the Boat Deck screens," said Bliss. For a minute or two, nothing seemed to be happening; then Hartman saw that the floodlit waves were rising a little higher: higher still, and then, with an accelerating motion, they broke over the lenses of the cameras on the hull. The screens blurred for a few moments, then cleared, and they were looking at a

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cloudy green underwater world. A shoal of little fish darted away.

One by one the banks of television cameras were submerged: E Deck, D, C, B, A; then the Main Deck, Promenade Deck, Upper Deck, Quarter Deck, Sports Deck, and finally the Signal Deck itself; and through the thick quartz deadlights, Hartman could see with his own eyes that the water was surging up over them.

Risen again, her decks hosed down and scrubbed, Sea Venture moved week after week alone over the abyss. There were days of mild breezes, when the sea was a pale, sun-wrinkled blue, and flying fish hurled themselves ahead in liquid arcs. Even when the seas rose higher, crashing against Sea Venture's hull with massive force, the vessel plowed ahead, steady as a tabletop. As the weather grew warmer, more and more bathers appeared in Sea Venture's four open-air pools, and the Sports Deck was crowded with tennis players, volleyball players, shuffleboard players.

On their television screens every day, the passengers watched, with mingled shock and pleasure, the gray blizzards that were sweeping over the East and Midwest. Baltimore was immobilized under three feet of snow; there were thirteen feet in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Christmas came when they were a month out of Honolulu: there was a huge tree in the Upper Deck lobby; Christmas carols chimed in the crowded corridors; and all the restaurants served a traditional dinner of roast turkey, mashed potatoes, candied yams, cranberry sauce, and mince and pumpkin pie.

Bliss called home on a video circuit at nine o'clock that evening; it was ten in the morning Liverpool time, halfway around the world. His wife's image cleared; her hair was a new color, in tight curls around her ears. "Hallo, dear, Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas," said Bliss. "How are you getting on?"

"Oh, we're very well. How is your voyage going?"

"The usual," said Bliss. "Is everyone all right?"

"Oh, yes, we're all very well. Where are you now, dear?"

"We're just a day's voyage east of the date line — you can look that up on your globe. Very calm seas, good weather. Is Tommy there?"

"Yes, he is, dear. He wants to wish you a merry Christmas."

Her image retired and was replaced by the callow visage of his son. "Hallo, Dad. Merry Christmas and so forth."

"Same to you, Son. Doing all right on the job, are you?"

"Oh, the job. Well, I quit that job, Dad. But I'm getting another very soon. A pal of mine has promised me it. There's an opening coming up right after the first of the year."

"Yes, I see. Did my parcels come all right?"

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"Yes, they did, Dad, thank you very much. We're opening gifts tonight. I can't wait to see what they are. Did ours come, did you get them?"

"No, not yet, but I expect they'll be waiting in Guam or Manila. You know what the mails are."

"Yes, they're awful. That's too bad, I did want you to have my gift on Christmas Day. Well, here's Mum."

His wife's face reappeared. "Well, dear, no good running up the bill for nothing. Have a happy Christmas."

"You, too. Good-bye, dear," said Bliss.

8

Marcia sent a fax of a statement for the press, as she had promised, and Newland approved it with a few minor changes. Bronson would not like it.

His troubles with Bronson, and perhaps with the whole L-5 movement, went back about five years, when he had first begun to suspect that Bronson's ties to the aerospace industry and the Pentagon were more far-reaching than he had supposed. It bothered him to know that there were people pushing L-5, not for the advancement of the human spirit, but for a share of the mind-boggling profits to be made from any large construction in space. And he knew that was naïve, but once he began questioning other people's motives, it was inevitable that he should question his own. For the past year or so, whenever he was interviewed about L-5, there had been a small inner voice in his head saying, *Are you telling the whole truth?*

After the newspaper stories had appeared, of course, there was no point anymore in trying to conceal his presence on Sea Venture. He stayed out of public places as much as he could, anyhow; he disliked the way people carefully did not look at him in his wheelchair, and he disliked crowds. Even Hal was a distraction to him sometimes. He needed to be alone; he needed to think.

The human race had to do *something*. There were almost 6 billion people in the world, and 500 million of them were starving. There was famine in India, Africa, South America. Acid rains were killing forests all over the Northern Hemisphere. A dozen armed and angry nations were poised with LOW systems to retaliate against any nuclear aggression. It was true that the ocean was an enormous unused resource, vaster than the land. Could it feed and house the billions to come? Could it relieve the pressures long enough for humanity to solve its problems and survive?

The day after Christmas there was another celebration when they crossed the international date line and Sunday turned into Monday. Higpen called Newland on the phone. "They'll do some kind of King Nep-

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tune performance in the theater, but if you want to see the real thing, come over here about three o'clock."

"Thank you, Ben," Newland said.

In the town square they found what looked to be the whole perm population of Sea Venture. The square itself was packed except for one open lane marked off by ropes; people were sitting on metal bleachers, and others were looking out of the windows on the upper level.

"You know, you're one of the stars of the show," Higpen said in his ear. "You don't mind, do you? If you're worried about anything, we can call it off."

"No, that's all right," Newland said with some misgivings.

Higpen left him in a roped-off area with six other people who greeted him shyly. "We're the greenhorns," one of them told him. "Our first time over the line — yours, too? Well, don't worry — they say it isn't too bad."

Then a brass band struck up a lively tune. Down the open lane came a curious procession: first the band, high school students by the look of them, in green and gold uniforms; then a goat on a cart, dressed in a gray jacket and trousers and wearing a hat; then two strikingly handsome people, a man and a woman, dressed in not very much, with pale green makeup on their bodies and masks on their faces. With a flourish of trumpets, they mounted a platform in front of the fountains.

"Know all ye who are subjects newly come to our realm," cried the man, "that your fishy king and queen require and demand your fealty. If there be any here who refuse to submit, let them be taken and thrown into our briny deep."

Another blast of trumpets, and the procession came around again. This time Newland and the rest of his group, Hal included, were ushered to the head of the parade, two by two. When they reached the space below the platform, the green man waved his trident over Newland and Hal, crying, "I baptize you in the name of Father Ocean!" The woman beside him showered them both with green confetti, and then they were both being kissed by a number of young women who hung garlands of seaweed around their necks.

After that there was a good deal of shouting and singing; somebody was putting on a skit, apparently, and there was prizegiving, but Newland could not make out much of it. Eventually the meeting began to break up, and Higpen came to rescue them.

"Now you're citizens of the sea," he said happily. "That means you belong to our family forever, whether you like it or not."

"Ben, I like it," said Newland.

9

The next day, Chief Controller Bliss

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showed him around the Control Center — it was not called the bridge —a comfortable, brightly lighted place lined with consoles and cabinets. There were four small, very thick quartz windows, the first he had seen in Sea Venture — two looking forward, one port, one starboard. For the rest, they relied on television screens.

Afterward, Deputy Ferguson, who was going off shift, took him and Hal down to see the marine lab. He opened a door marked NO ADMITTANCE and held it for Newland's chair to pass through. Beyond was a tiled corridor with doors opening on either side. "This is our marine section," Ferguson said. "We're quite proud of it — a lot of very valuable work has been done here."

"Justifying the appropriations," said Newland with a smile. "What exactly do you do here?"

"Ocean charting, currents, bottom sampling, salinity and temperature measurements, pollutants, that kind of thing."

Through the open doors Newland glimpsed office desks, filing cabinets, banks of instruments. They crossed a room lined with tanks in which large, bright-colored fish lazily swam. At the end of the corridor was a heavy door, open; beyond it was a room with a large window in the far wall.

"This sill may be a little problem," said Ferguson.

"No, it's all right," Hal answered, and boosted the chair across.

"Is this a watertight door?" Newland asked.

"Yes. We're right down at the bottom of the hull here, and that section beyond the window is open to the sea. Here's Randy Geller. He can tell you more about it."

Geller came forward, a tall, pale young man with a reddish beard. He smiled politely when Ferguson introduced him. "I was just about to take a bottom sample," he said. "Maybe you'd like to watch?"

"Yes, very much."

Geller led him over to the window, through which Newland could see a gray-walled chamber. Overhead were tracks with traveling cranes, hoists, and cables; below was green water that surged slowly from left to right, slapped against the wall, and surged again.

"The pressure is equalized, I suppose," said Newland; "that's why you have to have the window."

"That's right," Geller said with a surprised lift of his eyebrow. "People usually ask, 'Why doesn't the water come in and sink the ship?' We could pressurize this whole section, the way they do in the fishery, but that would mean decompressing every time we leave, and it would be a nuisance. We can also watch what goes on in there through TV cameras, but their lenses keep getting wet; it's a convenience to have the window." He pointed to a bank of television screens, only one

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of which was turned on: it showed a vague greenish background against which yellow motes drifted. "This is the dredge camera; it ought to be just about at the bottom by now. It's a thousand meters here."

They watched in silence until something began to show up on the screen: a pebbled floor, gray-green at first, then brown, then purple-brown as it came nearer. Geller touched a control. "This is an anomaly," he said. "Manganese nodules. Most of them are farther southwest."

Newland was watching attentively. "How big are the nodules?"

"I'd say these are about ten centimeters. We'll see when we get the sample up." He touched the controls again; the view in the screen rotated downward slightly until they could see the leading edge of a complex metal object, greenish yellow in the light. "Here we go." The metal edge bit into the bottom; a cloud of sediment rose. Geller threw a switch. "Now we just have to wait for it to come up." In the screen the cloudy water slowly receded; they saw the dredge again, with tiny particles streaming downward at an angle.

"One thing I'm curious about," Newland said. "I notice that the water motion seems to be in a crosswise direction, but I assume that the camera we're seeing here is facing toward the bow. Now, if we're moving with the current, why is that?"

"Wind and current," said Geller.

"Well, but are the currents different on the bottom? That's what I meant to ask."

"There are no currents worth mentioning on the bottom here, but from the surface down to about a hundred meters, the direction of the current does change — it rotates clockwise in the Northern Hemisphere. So when we're moving with the current at the surface, we're dragging the cable against the resistance of that fan of crosswise currents; and when we reel it in, it comes back at an angle."

"I see. How long will it take to reel it in?"

"About half an hour, but I can show you what we got on the last grab, if you want."

Under a large half-cylinder of white-painted metal on the wall beside the window was a marble-topped table on which was spread what looked like a heap of clods and dirt. When Newland looked at it more closely, he saw that the clods were purplish granular lumps about the size of his fist; the rest was brown clay. Geller handed him one of the lumps, and he turned it over curiously. "How do these form, anyhow? If that isn't a silly question."

"No, it's a good question. Nobody knows how they form. There's one theory that the manganese is in volcanic material under the layer of sediment, and it filters up somehow and condenses out at the sediment-water interface. The reason you find it in

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fields like this is that it condenses only around solid objects, usually fragments of volcanic rock. But you find other things inside them, too — sharks' teeth and the ear bones of whales."

"That's fascinating," said Newland. "Like pearls forming around grains of sand?"

A prim scientific smile twisted Geller's lips. "Well, not exactly."

Newland did not quite smile in return. "Could we see what's inside this one?" he asked.

"Sure, if you want," Geller took the nodule, picked up two others from the table, and took them to a machine that looked a little like a large stainless-steel nutcracker. He put the first nodule into the steel jaws, depressed the handle, and pulled out a little heap of fragments. "Rock," he said, showing Newland a triangular reddish chunk. He put the second nodule in, cracked it. "Rock." Then the third. "Well, well," he said. "Will you look at this?"

Newland bent closer. In Geller's palm, half-surrounded by fragments of porous manganese, was what looked like a cracked hollow sphere of glass. "What is it?"

"Looks like an australite. That's a real anomaly."

"I'm sorry, what's an australite?"

The horror began when Geller opened his mouth to reply. His eyes closed and he staggered. He came upright again, looking bewildered, with his hand to his brow.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know. I felt like I was about to faint."

"All right now?"

"Sure. Never did that before." He bent to pick up the fragments he had dropped, and brushed the dirt away from the glass sphere. "An australite's a kind of tektite. Found near Australia, that's why they call them that. This one shouldn't be here."

"What are they, exactly?"

"Nobody knows that either. They show evidence of melting and deformation, so they've got to be some kind of meteorite, but they're never found together with any kind of meteorite material that could have melted to form them. There are theories about that, too. I'm not that crazy about theories. What we need are data." He put the cracked glass sphere carefully down on the table. "Wait till my boss sees this."

10

The long murmuring corridors were carpeted in different colors — blue for port, red for starboard, shades of violet and purple in between — so that it was easy to tell where you were in Sea Venture. Stevens roamed the vessel, watching the crowds. Most of the passengers looked Middle American, overdressed and overjeweled, but there was an exotic sprinkling of saris and chadors. He sunned himself

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beside the pool on the Sports Deck and cultivated a nodding aquaintance with some of the young bathers. He visited the casino in the evening and lost a few hundred dollars at roulette. He sat in the lounge with the older passengers, looking at the sky and ocean in the television screens that cleverly counterfeited windows. Several times as he strolled down the corridors, he saw a gray head over the back of a wheelchair, but when he caught up, it was always an old woman.

From his room Stevens called the operator and was told, not to his surprise, that no Paul Newland was listed among the passengers. In the interest of thoroughness, he asked for Harold Winter, the young man who was known to be traveling with Newland; Winter was not listed either.

Stevens was present for every meal in the Liberty Restaurant: breakfast, the ten o'clock snack, lunch, four o'clock tea, dinner, the midnight munch. The man he was waiting for did not appear. Evidently he and his companion were taking all their meals in their room. If this state of affairs continued, then it would be seen as a blunder that Stevens had not tried to book a suite on the Signal Deck; but there was nothing to be done about that now.

Meanwhile, both for his own comfort and for professional reasons, he needed a companion: to be alone in Sea Venture was to be conspicuous. For that very reason, there were few unattached women. Stevens narrowed his choice to three, all passably attractive young women traveling with their parents. In casual ways, as opportunity presented itself, he got on speaking terms with all three families. One of them took to him more cordially than the other two: Mr. and Mrs. Prescott and their daughter Julie. The Prescotts had spent some time in Europe, where Prescott had been the art director of an automobile company; they were able to share recollections of Paris, Lausanne, Madrid. In response to their delicate queries, he told them that he was a naturalized American citizen, an executive with a family-owned investment firm, taking a sea cruise for his health. In return, they intimated that the daughter, who was fair-haired and sad, was recovering from some ruptured romance. She had given up a job as a graphics designer, and thought she might paint, or go into social work.

Gradually he became a member of their group; they went to lectures together, dined together, strolled on the Promenade Deck. By occasional glances, Stevens indicated that he was more than politely interested in Julie, but he made no overt gesture. Presently the parents began to display a kittenish insistence on throwing the two young people together. One evening, when the elder Prescotts had retired early, pleading fatigue ("It must be the sea air!" said Mrs. Pres-

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cott, with a girlish laugh), Stevens took Julie to the Quarterdeck Bar and spent an hour with her exchanging confidences. There had, in fact, been a tragic romance; the man had died. There seemed not to be any particular meaning in life, Julie said, but she knew that she had to go on. He took her back to her suite and left her with a European bow and a chaste kiss on the knuckles. Patience was everything; there was plenty of time.

He took her dancing on the following evening, and they stopped for a nightcap in the Liberty Bar. It was quite late. The only other customers were three couples — one drunk and argumentative, the rest too drunk to talk — and a large young man who sat by himself in a corner, nursing a tall drink. Stevens recognized him instantly from his photograph: it was Harold Winter.

Stevens took Julie home, kissed her good night, and went back to his cabin to think about methods. His instructions were to dispose of his victim in such a way that the crime could never be solved; it was to remain a mystery. Since it never would have crossed his mind to conduct himself in any other way, Stevens had accepted this without comment, but he had thought about it a good deal and had drawn a conclusion from it, which was that his new clients were not merely interested in the death of Professor Newland: they wanted the crime to remain unsolved, not out of any solitude for Stevens, to be sure, but because they wanted the blame to fall on someone else. These were merely speculations, and had nothing to do with him as a professional, but he also noted that appropriations bills for the space colony program were coming up in Congress, and it occurred to him that if the revered leader of the L-5 movement were to be murdered aboard Sea Venture, it could hardly fail to cause a public outcry that might sway a vote or two. Therefore, he thought he knew who his new clients were; the knowledge gave him a certain private satisfaction.

At any rate, he wished to do his job in a way that would be pleasing to his clients, and he was beginning to see the possibility of a pattern: the young nurse-companion who never leaves his employer's side except when the latter is asleep. If that could be established, then the first part of his problem was solved; that was to say, the isolation of the victim. The rest was merely a matter of ingenuity, of finding the most elegant solution.

11

Captain Hartman prowled the corridors of Sea Venture, sensing a whiff of wrongness. In the days before his retirement, when he was captain of the *Queen,* he had begun every day like this, taking each section in turn except the engineering section, the chief engineer's exclusive domain. He

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had carried a flashlight to shine under tables and counters, looking for dirt. He had looked for obvious things — equipment not put away or not in good order, brasswork dull, spoiled food in the refrigerators — but that was only a part of it; he had always been alert with some sixth sense for the wrongness that was not obvious, and more than once he had found it.

In a way he felt guilty about inspecting another man's vessel, but the compulsion would not let him rest. He had nothing to say against Bliss. Sea Venture was too big; Bliss had to delegate the inspections to his deputies; Hartman understood that. He walked the ship every day, nevertheless. He listened to the roar of New Rock in the cabaret and saw the old folks in their dance hall, swaying to the strains of "Louie, Louie." He went down into the working alleys where the butchers and bakers plied their trades; he watched the maids coming and going with mounds of linen. He walked the Promenade Deck, with its tall angled television screens that almost perfectly counterfeited windows looking out on the ocean; he made the circuit of the Sports Deck, overseeing the cheerful tennis players and bathers, watching the oldsters at their shuffleboards. Through Deputy Ferguson, he managed an invitation to visit the perm section, saw the fishery and the hydroponics farm, watched the children playing.

It would have been easy to say that it was only the difference of Sea Venture to any ship he had known that disturbed him. Bliss was quite right: It was not a ship. The *Queen* had been a floating hotel in name, but this was one in fact. Bar Bliss and himself, there was not a sailor aboard. There were no engines, only a generator for electricity; the cylindrical things that passed for sails were opened and shut by computer-operated mechanisms. The vessel had three independent inertial-guidance systems, and it got its position by satellite signal. A raft was what Bliss called it, and there was some justice in that. But he himself, aboard the *Queen,* had been nine-tenths manager and one-tenth sailor; it was not the passing of the old days that was on his mind. There was something else. He felt it; he smelled it; sometimes it was near.

Luis Padilla accepted the dishes from the sous chef, placed them on his cart, lifted the covers to verify the contents — artichoke hearts, jellied consommé, caviar, crackers. Correct. He stopped at the wine steward's for a half-bottle of Tio Pepe, then wheeled the silent cart out through the service doors, along the corridor to the elevator, up to the Sports Deck. He tapped on the door of No. 18.

"Come in!" That voice, like an overripe apricot. He entered.

She was there, in a frilly garment

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of no substance, very large, larger than ever, quaking as she moved. The Mrs. Emerton, almost two meters tall and weighing surely seventy kilos, her hair in ringlets. The Mr. Emerton was not there.

"Put it down, Luis dear. I'll sign later, all right? I'm just about to take my shower." She looked at him coquettishly as she disappeared into the bathroom.

On the dressing table, half-obscured by the evening gown draped over the chair, was an open jewel case. Pearls, gold chains hung over the edge of it like pirate treasure. At the end of one of the chains lay a pendant, an emerald the size of a thumbnail, winking green.

Padilla transferred the covered dishes to the table, arranged the silverware, whipped out his corkscrew and opened the bottle, sniffed the cork and set it down. He verified that everything was properly arranged before he left, with a last glance at the emerald.

It was not the first time she had allowed him such a glimpse. Mrs. Emerson was very careless, or else she was hoping to tempt him into an indiscretion. But he would never succumb. Once, when he was ten, his American teacher had come to class in a drunken condition and had sung to them a song his grandfather had taught him. It was a song that the American soldiers had sung during the Occupation. *Damn, damn, damn the Filipino, lazy, cowardly ladrón. Underneath the starry flag, civilize him with a Krag, and return us to our own beloved home.* He had thought that a crag was part of a mountain, and that the American soldiers wanted to crush the Filipinos by dropping a mountain on them. He had found out since that it was Krag, a kind of rifle.

The song accompanied his steps as he wheeled the empty cart back to the elevator. When he was much younger, maybe six or seven, his father had beaten him for stealing a toy in the drugstore. "We are not thieves, do you understand?" Whack. "*No somos ladrónes.* Do you understand?" Whack. "Do you understand?" It was the best lesson he had ever had. Mrs. Emerton could expose her jewels, or her body if she liked: they were both safe from the staff of Sea Venture. Padilla was whistling as he entered the kitchen.

Later, in the stewards' lounge, he sat with his friend Manuel Obregón and drank a little wine. Obregón and he were employed in different parts of Sea Venture, but they had joined at the same time and had kept up their acquaintance. They talked in a mixture of Tagalog, Spanish, and English, with many jokes and much laughter. Suddenly Padilla felt a little dizzy; his elbow slipped off the table, and he almost fell forward before he caught himself. To his horror, when he straightened up, he saw that his friend had slumped off his chair and was ly-

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ing like a dead man, with a bloated face and eyes turned up.

12

Dr. Wallace McNulty, at the age of forty-nine, had had a singular notoriety thrust upon him. A garbled newspaper item about his being elected president of the Santa Barbara County Medical Society, shortly after the death of his wife of twenty years, had been published in the *New Yorker,* in one of those little quotes they ran at the ends of columns. Instead of just saying that he had graduated from the University of California, the item had gone on to list a whole lot of other states, as if he had graduated from all of them, too. Dr. McNulty carried the clipping around in his wallet awhile and showed it to friends, feeling embarrassed but thinking he ought to be a good sport; he found, however, that one out of every three people would read the clipping and then blink at him and say, "Did you really—?" Then he would have to explain that it was a joke, a mistake. He threw the clipping away after a week or two, but whenever he introduced himself to people, there was always a moment when he was waiting for them to say, "Dr. Wallace McNulty? Aren't you the one who—?" He found that he was becoming suspicious of new acquaintances, and even of his own patients that he had had for years.

The opportunity to join Sea Venture had come along in an almost providential way. A friend of his, Ray Herring, had been hired as director of the medical services there, but at the last minute some family trouble came up and he had to stay in Santa Barbara. Ray asked Dr. McNulty if he wanted the job, and Dr. McNulty discovered that he did. He applied and was accepted.

On the whole, he had never been sorry. He had a little eight-bed hospital on the Upper Deck, the latest in diagnostic equipment, and three cheerful nurses. His work load was less than it had been at home, but he was making more money, even without counting the free room and board.

One morning when he was in the middle of his usual series of earaches and sore throats, Janice came to him with the phone in her hand. "Doctor, it's an emergency — somebody collapsed down in the marine lab."

"O.K, give me that. Will you finish up with Mrs. Oruma?" He walked into the next room, talking as he went. "McNulty. What's the problem?"

A woman's voice said, "I don't know. One minute he was O.K., the next—"

"Is he breathing? Conscious?"

"Well, he's breathing kind of slowly. His eyes are half-open, but he doesn't seem to hear when we talk to him. I think you'd better come down here."

"On my way. Cover him up with a blanket or something."

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McNulty put his head into the examination room, where Janice was swabbing Mrs. Oruma's ears. "I'm going to need a stretcher and a couple of guys. Will you—?"

"Already done, Doctor. They're on their way."

"Well, hell," said McNulty, secretly pleased.

When he got to the marine section, he found a little group gathered around a red-bearded man who lay in front of a fish tank, with three or four lab coats thrown over him.

"O.K., who was here when it happened?" McNulty asked, kneeling beside the patient. He checked the airway, began to take a pulse: it was slow and weak.

"I was," said a dark-haired woman. "We were just standing here talking. He didn't say anything for a while, and I looked over at him, and he had a funny expression on his face, and then he was going down."

Later McNulty wrote in his notes: "Randall Geller, marine scientist, age 31. Collapsed in marine lab appr. 9:20 A.M., Dec. 29. No evidence of trauma. EEG negative. Chem scan negative. Patient is stuporous, does not respond to stimuli."

On the following day he had another patient with exactly the same symptoms: Yvonne Barlow, Geller's boss in the marine lab. She was the dark-haired young woman he had talked to before, the one who had been with Geller when he collapsed.

McNulty was puzzled. He went back down to the lab, looked around, and asked questions, hoping to find there had been a leakage of some noxious gas, but nobody had been using any such thing. The fact that Geller and Barlow had been stricken a day apart suggested a communicable disease, but if so, it was not like anything he had ever heard of. His two patients remained stuporous and unresponsive.

Late that afternoon he got a third one, Manuel Obregón, a steward. Obregón had been in the room when Barlow collapsed.

It began to look to McNulty as if he had an epidemic on his hands. He put in a call to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. Their computer had never heard of this, either.

13

From his position in the midst of the electrical network of the man's brain, he could see another person approaching. It was time to go; he felt the tug of new adventure. He slipped out and for a dizzy instant was only an energy pattern aware of other patterns in space, a perilous dark field that stretched to infinity. He moved to the nearest one, merged with it, slipped in, and again she experienced that incredible flood of sensory information, the vivid colors, the scents, the friction of clothes against her body, the tightness of un-

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dergarments and shoes, the sounds, the signals that told her the positions of her limbs. The shock was so great that her knees went weak for an instant and she almost fell. When she came upright again, she saw the man lying on the floor, eyes half-open, mouth slack. It was always that way when she left; she could hold them together while she was inside, and even make some simple improvements in the network of their minds, but once she was gone, they felt the drain of the energy she had taken.

"Julie, are you all right?" A man she knew, John Stevens, was bending over her.

"Yes, I think so," she heard herself say. "I just felt — What's wrong with that man?"

"Some kind of seizure. Sit down here a moment; let me see if there's anything I can do."

When he came back, he said, "They've called the doctor. Are you sure you're all right?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Let's go in." She observed with fascination the changes that were taking place in her body in response to his presence, the contact of their skins, the faint male odor that underlay the scent of his cologne. She had felt something like this once or twice before, in other bodies, but never so strongly. Her heartbeat had sped up; she could feel her cheeks flushing.

Now they were in the restaurant, where the tables were spread with spotless cloths the color of saffron, gleaming china, silver, crystal; a slender vase of flowers was on each table, and the saffron napkins stood in folded flowerlike shapes. A waiter in a saffron jacket handed them the saffron menus. She heard herself say, "I think I'll just have the sole. I'm not very hungry."

"Julie, if you're not feeling well, you really ought to go and lie down."

She felt the responses again, stronger than before. She was intensely aware of her own thighs, of the man's knees, a few inches away from hers under the table. "I don't want to worry Mom and Dad," she heard herself say.

"Look, I'm not hungry either. Let's go up to my room, and you can lie down for half an hour until you're feeling better."

Now they were leaving the restaurant, walking down the violet corridor, passing the other people in their variegated clothes. All these sights and scents were pleasing to her, even though the host body was paying no attention to them; she wished they had stayed for dinner, to experience more of the sensations of human food, which she had found so pleasurable in the past; but there would be time for that.

They were riding up in the hushed elevator — what ingenuity! Now they were walking down another corridor. The man was opening a door, ushering her inside with a broad, warm

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hand on her back.

"Julie, dear," he said, drawing her into an embrace. Their bodies were pressed together, the soft tissues flattening; his hand slid higher on her back, his mouth came warm and moist on hers. Her eyes shuttered; her arms went around him, probing the hard muscles of his back. His tongue came gently into her mouth, and she felt herself slumping against him. The hollow organ between her legs was moistening, softening. The breath went out of her lungs; she turned her face away and pressed it into his shoulder.

"Julie — dear—"

Her heart was beating violently; the sensations were so strong that she could hardly bear them. Now he was unbuttoning her blouse, drawing it down over her arms. He unfastened her brassiere; his hands were on her breasts. Now he left her for a moment to pull back the covers of the bed; now he took off her skirt and panties, threw them at a chair. Now she was lying naked on the bed, her moist skin feeling the coolness. Through half-closed eyes she saw him undressing. The organ between his thighs stood up stiff and glistening. Evidently this was going to be a reproductive activity, the first she had witnessed in humans. Her interest almost overcame her excitement.

And now he was kissing her body; now he was entering her, and now, now, she felt her hips bucking as the sensations rose to a level she would not have believed possible.

When the postcoital courtesies were over, they got dressed and went down to the Upper Deck Grille. Stevens, who had been concealing his ferocious hunger, wolfed down a tenderloin and a baked potato; Julie had the chef's salad.

Stevens took her to the door of her stateroom and left her, murmuring, "Tomorrow." Back in his room, he felt relaxed and cheerful, but not at all sleepy. During the middle passage of his duet with Julie, a really intriguing idea had occurred to him. There was no reason not to check it out before he went to bed. Stevens got a traveling bag from the closet, took out a soft leather case and put it in his breast pocket. He took the elevator down to the Boat Deck. He met no one in the corridor.

He chose a bay twenty feet from the elevators. The two facing entrances were heavy watertight doors. He bent to examine the lock of No. 53. It was an inconspicious slot, obviously for a magnetic key. From his kit Stevens took a strip of plastic with a round handle and connected it to a flat black metal box. He slid the plastic strip gently into the lock, watching the lights that blinked in sequence. He withdrew the strip and put it into a slot in the box; the lights blinked again, went out, and a single green light appeared.

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Stevens smiled. He withdrew the strip and put it into the lock. There was a faint hum, and the massive door opened.

Stevens entered, closed the door behind him, and bent to look at the door of the lifeboat itself. He tried the same key, and it opened. The lights and the blower came on inside. Stevens stepped in and looked around. Beside the door, as he remembered, was an access panel. With a screwdriver from his kit, he had it off in a couple of minutes. Inside was an array of switches labeled UMBILICAL, SIGNAL, and so on. The last one was AUTO LAUNCH; beside it was a timer.

Stevens smiled again; he replaced the panel and left as he had come, locking both doors behind him. In all probability there was a circuit that would signal the opening of the doors on a console in the Control Center, but if anybody came to look at it, they would conclude that it was an electrical malfunction.

In his room he lay on the bed and watched a Chinese film broadcast from Hong Kong. There were English subtitles, and also Chinese subtitles. The costumes were gorgeous. The plot seemed to concern a young woman who was masquerading as a man disguised as a woman. There was a bride, who at one point appeared with an orange lampshade on her head. The heroine spent a good deal of her time languishing in graceful postures, but every now and then she lost patience with a gang of warriors and laid them out in rows.

Then a documentary about microelectronics. Stevens turned off the television and went peacefully to sleep.

In the morning he called the operator and asked for the Washington Suite.

"Yes?" said a male voice.

"Professor Newland, please."

"I'm sorry, there's no one by that name here."

Next he tried the Lincoln Suite, with a similar result. Then the Cleveland Suite. Then the Jefferson Suite. The Adams Suite did not answer. He tried the McKinley Suite.

Hello?"

"Professor Newland?"

"Who's calling?"

"This is Jack Boyle of the *CV Journal.* You know, the little newspaper we put out for the passengers? Is this Professor Newland?"

"No, I'm his assistant. Professor Newland doesn't give interviews."

"Oh, that's too bad. Well, thanks anyhow."

14

The Executive Council always met in a conference room on the Upper Deck, because it was about halfway between the Control Center and the perm section. Most of the others were already there when Bliss and McNulty

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arrived — the five Town Council members; Ben Higpen, the mayor; and representatives from the fishing and hydroponics sections. Yvonne Barlow usually attended to represent the marine scientists, but she was in the hospital, and the marine people had not sent anybody else.

Bliss found a seat for McNulty and then went up to the head of the table to talk to Yetta Bernstein, the council president. Yetta had her glasses on and was fussing with the papers in front of her.

"Mrs. Bernstein, pardon me," said Bliss, leaning over. "I've got an item for the agenda, if you don't mind."

She fixed him with a steely glance. "Agenda items are supposed to be provided ten days before the meeting. You know that, Mr. Bliss."

"I do, yes, but this is an emergency matter. A medical problem. I've brought Dr. McNulty to talk about it."

"What kind of medical problem?"

"A threatened epidemic."

"All right. I'll put you down for number seven."

Bliss said, "Thank you, Mrs. Bernstein."

He went back to his seat. Items one through six concerned the hiring of a new mathematics teacher for the high school, problems with the air-conditioning system, a proposed change in the spring planting schedule, and similar matters. Bliss tuned out for a while.

"Item seven," said Mrs. Bernstein. "A threatened epidemic. Dr. McNulty."

McNulty looked startled; he cleared his throat. "Two days ago," he said, "we started getting cases of what looks like an unknown infectious disease. I had two cases Monday, three more yesterday, and so far there are two new ones today. There are only eight beds in the hospital. We can cram another couple of beds in there, and maybe one more in the examination room, but that will be it. We're going to need more space, and until we find out more about this, I think it ought to be in an isolation area."

"What kind of disease is it?" asked the dentist, Ira Clark.

"It's completely unfamiliar. The patients suddenly collapse, go into a stupor. We're feeding them by stomach tube."

"Mr. Bliss?" said Mrs. Bernstein.

Bliss said, "Dr. McNulty has asked me to clear out a section on the Upper Deck, near the hospital, and relocate the passengers elsewhere."

"How big a section?"

Bliss raised an eyebrow at McNulty, who said, "No use doing it halfway. I'd like about a hundred rooms — that would be Corridor Thirteen from Corridor F to K. We're going to need some nurses, too."

"Let's do one thing at a time," said Mrs. Bernstein. "Mr. Bliss, what's your feeling about this?"

"I don't see that we have much choice. It will show up on the balance

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sheets later on, of course."

Mrs. Bernstein's lips tightened. "Can you get that many passengers to move?"

"Oh, yes. They won't be happy about it, though."

"Dr. McNulty," said another council member, "if we give you this hospital annex, or whatever you want to call it, can you contain the epidemic?"

"Oh, no. I didn't mean that. The disease doesn't seem to be communicable after the patient collapses. There's a latency period. But I just think it would be a good idea to isolate the patients. We can't have them all over the place, anyhow."

"Any further comments?" Mrs. Bernstein asked.

"Call for a vote," said Higpen.

"The motion is to approve clearing out a section of staterooms on the Upper Deck, from — what was it, Dr. McNulty?"

"Corridor Thirteen from F to K."

"All right. In favor?" All the hands went up.

"Motion carried. Mr. Higpen, will you find out who we've got that has nursing experience, and coordinate with Mr. Bliss and Dr. McNulty?"

"Yes. I can think of three or four."

"Meeting adjourned."

As the others left, Mrs. Bernstein, Mayor Higpen, and Ira Clark came toward them. "Let's go in here and talk," said Bernstein.

They sat at a circular table in the small room off the council chamber.

"Doctor, how serious is this?" Mrs. Bernstein asked.

"Hard to say. It's got me buffaloed; doesn't behave like any disease I ever heard of."

Ira Clark, a scholarly looking man, leaned forward. "What are the symptoms before a person collapses?"

"None that we know of. Well, there is one thing. A momentary dizziness or faintness a day or so before."

"What if we asked everybody to report to you if they felt dizzy? Could we isolate them that way and keep this thing from spreading?"

"Maybe. That's another can of worms, though. In a place this size, how many people feel dizzy? It's a common experience, especially in older folks."

"Would you be willing to try it?"

"Sure. Might need another hundred rooms, though."

"Mr. Bliss?"

"Gentlemen, and Mrs. Bernstein," said Bliss, spreading his hands, "I'm willing to do anything in reason, but can't we go a little slower? For the moment, at least, Doctor, don't you think a hundred rooms might be enough?"

"I guess so. If we run out, we can always ask for more space."

McNulty's phone beeped; he said, "Excuse me," and took it out of his pocket. "McNulty."

He listened a moment. "O.K., I'm coming." He put the phone away and said, "Got another patient — that

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makes eight. I've got to go."

15

The new patient was Julie Prescott, 28. Her parents were all over McNulty with anxious questions. With them was a young man named Stevens; he and Ms. Prescott had been on the Promenade Deck when she was stricken.

"Did you notice any dizziness at the time?" McNulty asked.

"Why, yes, as a matter of fact. It was just for a moment. That's odd, isn't it, because the same thing happened to Julie yesterday."

"Where was that? What time?"

In the Liberty Restaurant, about seven o'clock."

McNulty made a note. "Did a man collapse, near your table?"

"Yes. Really, Doctor, this is amazing."

McNulty felt a breath of cold air on his skin. He drew a cross and put a square around it. "Mr. Stevens, I'm going to see if I can have you assigned to another stateroom temporarily. It'll be in an isolation corridor here on the Upper Deck."

"Why, may I ask?"

"There's a chance that you're infected. I don't want to alarm you, but I think the best thing is to put you where we can keep an eye on you. You're traveling alone?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you did come down with it, you wouldn't want to be by yourself." McNulty pressed a button on his desk. "Jan, will you call Bliss's office and see if you can get Mr. Stevens into an isolation room as soon as possible?"

"Yes, Doctor. What room is he in now?"

McNulty asked, and passed the information along. "In the meantime," he said, "it would be better if you wouldn't go back to your room. If you'll wait in the outer office, as soon as we're ready to move you, we'll give you a buzz."

"This is very alarming, Doctor."

"I know it is, but you look to me like a young man who can do whatever has to be done."

"Thank you," said Stevens with a charming smile, and got up. "Until later, then."

The man did not wait. As he left the office, the watcher inside him was interested to note that his agitation was not expressed in the muscles of his face. His movements were natural and unhurried as he crossed the lobby to the elevator and stood aside to allow two elderly women to enter. As the elevator rose, he was thinking simultaneously of two things. One was that if, as seemed likely, he had been infected with Julie's disease, he had only a short time to work in. He could not take the risk of waiting until tonight to carry out his attack. Elegance would have to go; this would

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have to be quick and dirty. In his mind was the image of a sleek gray-steel gun, small enough to be concealed in the palm of his hand; he was visualizing its location in a locked traveling case in his closet.

Under this, rigidly suppressed, was the image of a man, himself, lying on a hospital bed with a tube up his nose, and the thought that of all possible things, he detested illness most. He was recalling that he had decided years ago that he would prefer death to being a helpless vegetable; but he put this thought aside. At the surface of his mind there were other images: the door opens, a large young man appears — Harold Winter, Newland's companion. Stevens raises the gun....

With regret, the observer realized that it was time to go. For him, too, there were unacceptable risks. He slipped out into that fuzzy black space of floating snowflake patterns, and drifted toward the nearest one.

Mr. and Mrs. Eulan Neffield had just finished dressing for dinner when there was a tap on the door. "Yes?" said Mr. Neffield.

"Security."

Mr. Neffield opened the door: there stood a woman in uniform, with a steward and a stewardess behind her. "Mr. Neffield, we're sorry to disturb you and your wife, but there's a medical emergency, and we're going to have to move you to another stateroom."

"What's this?" said Mrs. Neffield, coming forward alertly. "You've got to move us? What for?"

"We're clearing out this corridor to make a hospital annex, Mrs. Neffield."

"Well, I never heard of such a thing! I am certainly not going to move."

"That's perfectly all right, ma'am, but in that case you realize that you will be surrounded by people with an infectious disease."

"Oh, my God!" said Mrs. Neffield. "Eulan, what are you waiting for!"

16

When the elevator stopped, she was still shaky and disoriented; her companion, Mrs. Murphy, was standing against the wall, staring at the man on the floor and stuffing her fingers into her mouth.

"What happened?" she heard herself ask. Mrs. Murphy made an inarticulate noise.

The door slid open. "Come on," she said, taking the other woman's arm. "Let's get out, Georgette, hurry!"

In the corridor, as the elevator door closed, Mrs. Murphy said, "He just — he just—"

"Did you see it?"

"Yes, didn't you see it? He just fell down—"

"My back was turned. I felt all funny for a minute. Come on, dear,

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we'll have to report this to somebody."

"Is this the right floor?" Mrs. Murphy asked, looking around with a witless expression.

"Yes, the Signal Deck — see, right here. Come on, Georgette."

They passed a steward with a cart; he was raising his hand to knock on a door beside a discreet brass plate that read "McKinley Suite." The memory of something she had once known stirred in her, and she slipped out again, across the fuzzy void; and as the new avalanche of sensation struck him, he staggered and put his hand on the cart to steady himself. A woman was screaming, beside the body of another woman who lay sprawled on the floor, her skirts over her knees, eyeglasses beside her head.

Once he had quieted the screaming woman and turned her over to the two men with the stretcher who came to collect the other one, he was able to return his attention to his duties. The cart had been standing in front of the door for at least five minutes; the food would be cooling off, it was too bad.

He knocked on the door. Presently Mr. Winter opened it.

"Good afternoon, sir." He wheeled the cart in. "I'm sorry for the delay, but there was an unfortunate incident in the corridor. A lady was ill. I had to call for security."

"Is she all right now?"

"Yes, sir." He noticed with keen interest the small gray-haired man in the wheelchair. "Good afternoon, Professor Newland. Here is your lunch finally." He uncovered the tray and began laying out the dishes on the table.

"Did I hear you say someone was ill?"

"Yes, sir. Very unfortunate." He was near enough now, and he slipped out, moved across the void and was in again, raising his head and hearing Winter's voice: "Professor! Are you all right?"

"Yes," he said. "What's the matter with Kim?"

"He's unconscious. I'd better call somebody."

"First a woman in the hall, and now Kim. Do you suppose there's some kind of contagion?"

He did not listen to the reply; he was absorbed in the complex network of his new host's mind. He had expected that Newland would be interesting, and it was true: he was very interesting.

"Attention, all passengers and crew." The voice echoed down the corridors. In the lounges and restaurants, the casino, the shopping mall, heads turned to look at television screens. A round, serious face. "This is Chief Controller Bliss. I have to inform you that a possibly contagious disease has broken out on Sea Venture. The illness is marked by a sudden

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collapse. The patients are being cared for in our hospital, and they are in stable condition. There is no cause for undue alarm. You should be aware, however, that the illness is sometimes preceded by a temporary dizziness or a fainting spell. All those who have experienced anything of this kind in the presence of someone who has collapsed are asked to report to Dr. Wallace McNulty at his office on the Upper Deck. Further bulletins will be issued from time to time. Thank you for your cooperation."

A blue-haired old woman who heard this put her bird's-foot hand to her mouth.

"What's the matter, Fran?" said her husband.

"Why, I felt faint, you remember — when that man fell down in the lobby?"

"Oh, my gosh. Maybe it doesn't mean anything. I guess we'd better go find out, though. Do you think?"

"Oh, dear. I suppose so. And here I thought I was going on this trip to get away from doctors."

McNulty persuaded Frances Quincy and her husband to move into the isolation section. On the way she fell down senseless in the corridor, and he had another patient. An hour later the same thing happened all over again — a man this time, Chandragupta Devi, 71. He had been passing in the hall when Mrs. Quincy was stricken. In he went.

McNulty fed his notes into the office computer. He had the places and approximate times of onset of all the patients, and they formed a coherent chain. The computer displayed them in the three-dimensional skeleton of Sea Venture with colored lines between them. The lines started in the marine laboratory, went back into the crew quarters, then up to the Quarter Deck, then here and there all over the passenger section. In almost every case he could match up the time when one victim collapsed with the time the next one felt dizzy. There were a few where the times didn't match — three hours between Geller and Barlow, for instance — but that could be bad reporting or bad recollection.

What kind of epidemic was this, for God's sake? It wasn't spreading, it was being passed on to one victim at a time like the wand in a relay race. No wonder the experts couldn't tell him anything. There had never been anything like this in the world before.

17

On Tuesday there was a satellite call from the president, carried by the public television screens throughout Sea Venture. Bliss's voice was heard, but only the president's face appeared. The president was in the Oval Office, behind the famous desk with its Mickey Mouse figures. "Captain Bliss, I want you to know that the

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hearts of the American people are going out to you in this terrible emergency."

"That's very good to know, sir."

"And we realize, of course, that you're doing everything that can be done. We have complete confidence in you, Captain."

"Thank you, sir."

"And I've asked my staff to keep me informed of every development, day or night, and, Captain Bliss, we're having a special prayer meeting here tomorrow morning to ask for your safe recovery from this tribulation. And I know you're going to come through all right."

"Thank you, sir," said Bliss.

"Good-bye for now, and God bless you all."

The patients kept coming in, three a day, then four and five; the rooms in the isolation corridor were beginning to fill up. By the eighth day there were thirty-two victims. McNulty had left word with the night nurses to call him if there was any change, and every night he slept fitfully, expecting his phone to buzz, but it didn't.

On Friday things got worse. Thomas LeVore, 68, saw a woman collapse at breakfast, got up, walked out of the restaurant accompanied by his wife, and collapsed himself two minutes later. His wife, who was hysterical, said that he had felt a momentary faintness, and had been on his way to McNulty's office to report. A similar thing happened to Mrs. Frank Ballantine, 51, who had been near Mr. LeVore; and to Minoru Yamamoto, 78; and to four other people, all within the space of twenty minutes. Then there were no more cases until late that evening, when Mrs. Ora Abbott, 59, was carried in. Her husband told McNulty that she had felt faint in the corridor that morning — the same corridor where the other victims had collapsed — but had refused to go to McNulty's office.

On his way across the lobby the following morning, McNulty noticed that the crowd was unusually thin. People seemed to be trying to avoid each other. There was a funny smell in the air. The Madison Restaurant looked only about half-full. There was something different about the sound, too; there were no raised voices and no laughter.

McNulty greeted the security guard in the isolation corridor. He looked into each of the patient's rooms — there were fifteen now — read the charts, talked to Janice for a minute, and then got on the phone to Bliss.

"Mr. Bliss, I want to check something with you. Is attendance off in all the restaurants, or just the Madison?"

"It's pretty much everywhere. Less on the lower decks. Room service says their phones never stop ringing. We've had to transfer staff to room service, but they're still running hours behind. If you hadn't rung me, Doctor,

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I was going to ring you. Could we do some sort of announcement that would reassure the passengers?"

"I was thinking the same thing. Listen, I know this sounds crazy, but I'd like you to tell people not to come in if they feel faint. They were dropping like flies yesterday, all in the same corridor."

"I don't quite understand," Bliss said.

"I don't either, but I do know people have been keeling over when they start to come here." He told Bliss about Mrs. Abbott. "She wouldn't come in, and she lasted longer than any of the others. It doesn't make any sense, but for Pete's sake, let's try it."

"What would you suggest that I say?"

"Well, just that — hell, I don't know — tell them the medical emergency is under control, and so forth, and they don't have to report in anymore if they feel faint."

Bliss's sigh was clearly audible. "Very well, Doctor. I don't know if it will do any good, do you?"

"No."

Afterward McNulty sat and examined the small, tight knot of panic inside him. The medical emergency was not under control. It was his responsibility, and he couldn't do a thing. He had a growing number of patients who showed no sign of coming out of their stupor; for all he knew, they never would come out of it. It was hell looking at them in the morning — poor old Professor Newland, for instance, and that nice young couple, Julie Prescott and John Stevens, side by side, waxen and still.

18

Captain Hartman came down to breakfast as usual on Friday morning, and found himself alone in the sea of tablecloths except for a large young man seated two tables away. Presently a waiter came.

"Not much of a crowd today, is there?" Hartman said pleasantly.

"No, sir." The waiter, an Indian, did not smile.

"Orange juice, poached eggs, toast — cool the toast before you bring it, please." Hartman closed the menu. "Look, will you ask that young man if he'd mind my joining him? Not much sense in both of us eating alone."

"Yes, sir." The waiter bent over the young man's table. He looked up, smiled faintly, and gestured.

Hartman walked over. "Sorry if this is an intrusion. Hartman is my name."

"Hal Winter." They shook hands. "Please sit down."

"I rather expected to be the only one here this morning," Hartman said, unfolding his napkin.

"Yes. Most people are hiding in their rooms."

"Mind my asking why you're not one of them, Mr. Winter?"

"There doesn't seem to be much

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point in it. My friend collapsed when we were in our room — first a steward; and then him. How about you?"

"Oh, just perverseness, I expect. I'm a seafaring man, retired now, but I've never thought much of hiding in one's room."

The waiter brought their orders. Hartman's toast was warm. Winter, he was interested to note, had a strip steak and a salad. Over breakfast Hartman chatted easily about his experiences on the *Queen;* Winter seemed entertained, and even smiled once or twice.

"Any news about your friend?" Hartman asked.

"No, he's the same. I'm doing volunteer work on the night shift — they won't let me nurse him, of course, but I can sneak in every once in a while. He doesn't recognize me."

"You're a nurse, then, Mr. Winter?"

"Practical nurse, and I'm trained in physical therapy." After a moment he added, "This is a rotten thing to happen. He was in a wheelchair to begin with. He never complained."

"It must be very hard for you."

"Yes. He's a great man. Paul Newland."

"Oh, yes, I read he was aboard. There's some controversy about it, I believe."

"There were people who didn't want him to come."

Hartman thought a moment. "Mr. Winter, as a professional man, what's your opinion of this disease?"

"I'm not a doctor." Winter tore a roll apart, his eyes unfocused. "There doesn't seem to be anyting like it in the literature. Dr. McNulty is a G.P., but he's consulted with a lot of specialists, and they don't recognize it either."

"Not a mutation of some virus, like the Asian flu?"

"It doesn't act like any known disease."

Hartman chewed reflectively. "New things do seem to turn up. You remember Legionnaires' Disease, and AIDS, fifteen or twenty years ago?"

"And herpes. But this is different."

"Yes, I think it is. Mr. Winter, I remember reading once that some physicians can actually identify an illness by smell. Have you ever had that experience?"

Winter thought about it. "No."

"Please don't laugh. This isn't quite the same thing, but I have the strongest conviction that I can smell something in Sea Venture — not the individual patients, but the whole vessel. A scent of illness, perhaps."

"Or evil?"

Hartman put down his fork. "Have you felt it, too?"

"Yes," Winter said.

"I don't suppose," Hartman said delicately, "you've had nightmares?"

"Yes."

Hartman said good-bye and strolled down the corridors. The only people he met were stewards with carts; they all looked grim. The shop-

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ping mall was deserted;; only the pharmacy was open. There was an eerie silence, and a sort of darkness in Sea Venture now, as if the lights had gone dim, although when one looked at them, they seemed as bright as ever.

He was thinking about the first ships that carried the plague to Europe in the fourteenth century. What must it have been like to be the master of one of those ships, watching the people around him fall one by one?

New things did turn up. This might very well be something like the Black Death. Perhaps, he thought, it was something worse.

That night he dreamed that he was in a dark corridor of Sea Venture; all the lights were out, and in the yellowish no-light, he saw that the corridor was occupied by a monstrous squid, with garage-long tentacles that writhed toward him like sucker-disked serpents; and he felt utmost despair, because he knew the monster was an evil that could not be killed. He woke with the smell of rotting seaweed in his nostrils.

19

The messages flowed from Sea Venture's communication center through the antenna on the superstructure to the comsat overhead and back again:

" ... at fifteen and put it into Police Industries.... tell Mother I'm perfectly all right, not to worry at all.... and if we have to cancel, there's going to be big bucks going down the tube, so why don't you.... Larry, I want this favor. I want it. Do you understand what I'm telling you?... conditions here are absolutely outrageous ... not even a real doctor, just some kind of G.P., and this guy Bliss is... dying and she needs you.... if he thinks he can get away with this just because I'm out of touch.... talked to Jim Farbarn on the Hill today, and he says.... be sure to take your pills...."

And the newspapers, faxed in every day, were full of excited headlines: CV RAVAGED BY DISEASE ... PLAGUE MAY FORCE CANCELLATION OF CONCERT ... DOOMED PASSENGERS RIOT IN PANIC... FARBARN URGES PROBE OF CV....

Eddie Greaves was saying to his agent in New York, "If we have to cancel in Tokyo, I'm going to be in deep shit, Marty."

"I know that, Eddie. I'm working on it, believe me."

"You talk to Byers, yet?"

"Yes, and he's going to take it to the White House as soon as the president gets back from Monterey. I think we have a good shot."

"Good shot isn't good enough. I'm talking deep shit, Marty."

"I know that, Eddie."

"All right, who else can we get? You talk to Greg?"

"He's in Vegas."

"So talk to him in Vegas."

"He's either on, or he's at the crap table, or he's rolling some broad, Ed-

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die. You know how Greg is. The minute he heads back for Hollywood, I'll have him on the phone, I give you my solemn promise. Meanwhile, look, aren't there some folks with clout on CV? They're probably just as antsy to get off as you are. Go talk to them, Eddie, tell them what we're doing, find out what they can do. If we start putting pressure on from six different directions—"

"O.K. Good idea. O.K."

"And keep your ass sweet, kid."

The waiter approached the nice young couple with his carafe. "More coffee?"

"Yes, please," the man said. The waiter poured hers first, then the man's. As he turned away, something about the woman's expression remained in his mind, and he slipped out across the cold fuzzy void in the slow motion of that place toward the starflake pattern that was hers, and as he slipped in again, the colors and scents crashed against her more strongly than ever, and she raised her head, seeing the waiter's body sprawled on the floor, the carafe rolling, coffee in a long streaming splatter almost to the next table. People were standing up to look. Her husband leaned toward her.

"Are you all right?" she said.

"Yes, are you?"

"Yes." But she knew better. In spite of the shock, she had realized instantly what had happened, and had known what she must do.

"Thank heaven," said Malcolm. "Let's get out of here."

"I want to go to the ladies' room first." She got up and walked out. Her perceptions were blurred; she felt choked inside with sorrow for herself, for Malcolm, for the relationship they had had together. She was thinking that it was probably the second or third time in their married life that she had told him an untruth; also that it was a good thing that she had been able to turn away quickly so that he could not seen the expression on her face.

She took the first elevator going down and rode it to E Deck, where she had never been before. She was interested to notice that the corridors were narrower here, the walls and carpets plainer. The people she saw were wearing clothing she recognized as ready-made, and they were a little younger than the passengers on the upper levels; the restaurants had plain white tablecloths, and there were snack bars with plastic chairs. It was all part of the monetary system, apparently; the people here had paid less for their passage, and therefore the furnishings were less expensive; the people were younger because younger people had less money. Was it because they were younger that they also appeared less cheerful?

She came to a movie theater, paid and went in without noticing what the film was, but the observer inside

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her was able to read part of the sign over the entrance: ... IDE OF THE ROCKIES. LANCE MAHONEY. She had never seen a film in a theater before, although she had experienced many on the television screens in passengers' rooms, and deeply appreciated them as an art form as well as a wonderful source of information.

It was interesting that people would go to a theater to see films when they could see them as well in the privacy of their rooms: that was their contradictory gregariousness; they valued privacy so much that they were willing to pay high prices for the rooms whose smallness they complained of, and yet at every opportunity they sought the company of their own kind.

On the screen, a man in a checkered red jacket was paddling a canoe down a river. Her attention was not on it: she was looking at the people who sat in the darkness in couples and small groups far removed from each other — another illustration of the paradox, for she was aware that this was customary behavior even when there was no threat of infection. That was fascinating, and so was the almost uncontrollable emotion she was feeling as she sat down behind two men, one of whom had his arm around the other.

The woman knew that she was infected, although she mistakenly believed her illness was bacterial in nature; from the first moment, her concern had been that she should not pass on the infection to her husband. She believed she was going to die without seeing him again, and this was the cause of the sorrow that made her whole body tremble, an emotion as pure and intense as any she had so far experienced; and yet — another paradox — it did not occur to her to gratify her wish by staying with him for the time she had left. She had not encountered this particular response before, and it struck her as beautiful as well as mysterious.

She was able to follow the plot of the movie, more or less, since her eyes remained fixed on the screen although unfocused and blurred by warm moisture: the man in the checkered shirt, who had now abandoned his canoe and was walking through the forest, was escaping from pursuers in red uniforms, "the Mounties," evidently law enforcement officers; it was not clear what crime he was suspected of, or whether or not he was guilty. There was an encounter with some Indians and a beautiful blonde girl; the man in the checkered shirt rode with them in their vehicle until some tension developed between him and their leader; then there was a fight, and the checkered-shirt man defeated all the Indians by striking them with his hands and feet, and rode away in the vehicle with the girl.

Then, by a transition she could not follow, the man and the girl were seated at a campfire in the wilderness.

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Presently they got into a tent and appeared to perform a reproductive act. By the expression on the girl's face, which was shown highly enlarged, she was able to determine that the actress was attempting to counterfeit sexual emotion. It was surprising, she thought, that in the interest of realism as well as for the intense pleasure it gave the participants, the actor and actress had not engaged in a genuine act of copulation. Possibly, by convention, the act was performed only in private, in which case it was curious that it should be even simulated in public; or, perhaps, different circumstances were required.

After the film ended, with the man and the girl driving down a dusty road toward an incandescent sunset, the theater lights came up and the audience filed out. She went with them, thinking that she must find another place that offered concealment as well as the company of other people. She was feeling a dull disappointment that she had not collapsed in the theater. It would have been easy to grant her wish, but the situation was so novel that she was unwilling to leave her host until she saw how it would turn out.

In the corridor, she started when she heard a voice from the loudspeakers: "Paging Mrs. Malcolm Claiborne. Please come to the nearest courtesy phone. Paging Mrs. Malcolm Claiborne."

She was thinking how frantic Malcolm must be, of his relief if he found her. She went into a women's room and sat for a long time in a booth. "Honey, is anything the matter?" said a large woman with brass-colored hair as she came out.

"No, I'm O.K. Thanks." She made herself smile.

She went into a coffee shop and ordered a sandwich, which she did not eat. She was thinking that it must happen soon now. It would be most interesting, the observer thought, to see what she did when night came.

20

It was very late, and the crowds in the corridors were thinning out. As she walked past the lighted windows of the shops in the mall, she heard a voice from a distant loudspeaker. " ...since early this morning. When last seen, she was wearing a pale yellow skirt and blouse." In a television screen at the end of the lobby, she caught a glimpse of a photograph Malcolm carried; it seemed no more herself than any stranger's face.

She was thinking now with leaden disappointment that the thing was not going to leave her. She must find someplace to hide, to sleep.

What did people do who had nowhere to go? There were lounges, but a sleeping person would be conspicuous there; probably a steward would come to wake her up. Thinking of night and air, she got into the

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next elevator she came to and rode up to the Sports Deck. No one was in the lobby. She opened the weather door and stepped out onto the deserted tennis area. The moon and stars were brilliant in a prussian blue sky. She crossed the barrier and looked up. Out there, perhaps, was the star she had come from, uncounted millennia ago. It was possible, she thought, that between her sleeping and waking, the whole vast wheel of the galaxy had made a quarter-turn in its silent revolution. How many of her siblings had survived she could not know; probably none, unless the universe was richer than they had imagined. She herself had had the greatest possible luck: she had wakened among an intelligent, technologically skilled, and highly sensitive race whose culture and psychology were a puzzle that could occupy her happily for centuries.

There were many things she did not understand. She knew that she was aboard a floating contruction adrift, for reasons incomprehensible to her, on an enormous ocean of water, but she also knew that human beings were a land-dwelling race, with many great cities on the continents and islands of this world, and that Sea Venture was intended to land at a place called Guam, and then at another place called Manila, which she visualized as sunny and green.

The woman closed her eyes for a moment and leaned her forehead against the cool mesh of the barrier. It was unfortunate that her drain of energy caused so violent a reaction in her hosts when she left them; that was because from their point of view, she was a foreign body. She would have liked to offer them some reassurance; but she could not communicate with a host even indirectly, although she believed that her children would be able to do so.

She turned, and saw someone coming toward her along the deck: it was a man, young, with a silly soft cap on his head. His hands were in his pockets. As he came nearer, she saw that he had a weak, pale face.

"Good evening," he said. He was dressed in dungarees, much faded and patched, in the style of a generation ago; there was a flowered scarf at his neck. He looked anything but dangerous; he was about to pass on, but she said, "Can you tell me what time it is?"

He stopped and looked at his ring-watch. "It's 3:14. Pretty late. Can't sleep, huh?"

"No. That is — I have a problem."

He came a step closer. "What's the problem?"

She tried to smile. "No place to sleep. I — had a quarrel with my husband."

"Oh." He peered at her face. "Aren't you — I saw the squib on the p.a. Mrs Claiborne?"

"Yes. Please don't tell you saw me."

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"O.K., but your husband — won't he be pretty worried?"

"I can't go back there. Tomorrow, maybe, when he's had time to cool down...."

"Would he hurt you?" His face had turned anxious and sympathetic.

"He might."

"Well, look—" In the dim light she could see him flushing with embarrassment. "If you wouldn't mind — you could sleep in my room if you want. I mean, I stay up all night sometimes."

"That's very generous of you, Mr.—"

"Norm Yeager." He put out his hand awkwardly, and she took it. He pulled it away again a moment later, as if she had burned him. That was interesting; he seemed to be thinking of copulatory behavior and yet not to desire it.

"Well, then, if it's O.K.?"

"I am awfully sleepy."

His room was on the Promenade Deck near the bow. When he opened the door for her, the lights came on and music began to play. "I'll turn that off," he said hastily.

"No, I like it. It's Boccherini, isn't it?"

"You know music. That's great." He looked around the little room, darted at the bed, and swept up a pile of magazines. "Uh, can I get you anything? Are you hungry?"

"No, I just want to sleep." She pulled back the coverlet, kicked her shoes off, and lay down. "Thank you very much," she said, and closed her eyes. She felt the blackness welling up, and let it come.

The man leaned over to listen to her breathing. She was asleep already, he thought. He went to his relaxer and sat down. He had never had a woman in his room before, not like this, and it was exciting and dangerous. He felt that he had done something noble and strong; he loved her for accepting his protection, and he was glad that she was asleep so that he didn't have to talk to her.

His name was Norman Peale Yeager; at twenty-five, he was in charge of Sea Venture's two independent computer systems, not in name but in fact. His boss, Dan Jacobs, attended the staff meetings, made out the reports, and gave Yeager orders; but it was Yeager who knew the systems through and through, and Yeager who had to fix them if anything went wrong. He did a few hours of maintenance a week, and he was on call twenty-four hours a day, but most of his time was his own, and that was the way he liked it.

On his shelves he had dozens of old LPs, silky plastic discs whose almost invisible spirals gleamed iridescent when he tilted them to the light, and he had a lovingly restored 1982 stereo to play them on. In the evenings, alone in the lamplight, he played them over and over, loving the

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rich sounds hiding behind the hiss and crackle like sounds from the past filtering up through the layers of time.

Even older things obsessed him; he liked tales of dragons and heroes, of fair maidens carried fainting over saddlebows, of caves and quests and treasures. He daydreamed of living in a higher and nobler age, when a man could fight for good against evil and could triumph in victory or make himself immortal in defeat. Everything that was modern seemed to him an offense: the clothes people wore, the way they talked and moved, the blemishes on their skin. It seemed to him that some apocalypse must come, to burn and wash away the grimy world he knew.

He turned the music down and dozed in the chair. In the morning, not wanting the steward to see who was in his bed, he went out for breakfast. A little after noon, when he came back, he saw that the maid had been in the room, but Mrs. Claiborne was still asleep. About two o'clock he tried to waken her, and it was only then that he realized that it was not sleep but something else.

21

On the tenth day, about nine o'clock, one of the nurses came running in. "Dr. McNulty, one of my patients looks better. I think he tried to say something."

The patient was Randall Geller. He looked disoriented, but his eyes were focusing. His lips moved when McNulty bent over. "Wha' happened?"

"You've been very ill, Mr. Geller, but you're better now." McNulty took Geller's pulse; it was a little stronger.

Late that afternoon Yvonne Barlow regained consciousness. By that time Geller was feeling strong enough to be helped to the bathroom. McNulty called Bliss and said, "I think we're out of the woods."

It was a wonderful feeling, but it was premature.

22

By Monday, Randall Geller was sitting up, looking feeble but alert. McNulty asked him, "What do you remember about getting sick?"

"Not a thing. The last I remember, I was talking to Yvonne."

"What were you talking about?"

"I don't know, nothing much. Just talking."

"What about before then? Do you remember any momentary faintness, for instance?"

Geller looked thoughtful. "Well, yeah. The day before. Just for a second, I felt like I was going to fall down."

"What were you doing at the time?"

"I was talking to that visiting fireman. What's his name, Newland."

"What about?"

"Well, I was showing him some

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nanganese nodules we dredged up. There was an australite in one of them – a kind of glass meteorite. Pretty unusual."

"A glass meteorite," said McNulty, scribbling a note. "Never heard of that one. What do they look like?"

"This one was hollow, about a centimeter across."

"Don't suppose anything could have got out of it to make you sick," said McNulty, attempting a joke.

"Well, it could, I cracked it open."

McNulty stared at him. "Where is it now?"

"I gave it to Yvonne. I guess she put it away somewhere."

McNulty went and talked to Ms. Barlow. She was recovering a little faster than Geller had; there were deep semicircles under her eyes, but her color was good.

"Ms. Barlow, if you're feeling up to it, I'd like to ask you some questions. Do you remember anything about when you collapsed?"

"No. I was in the dredge room, and somebody called in that the lunch cart was here. And that's the last thing I remember until I woke up in the hospital."

McNulty made a note. "Mr. Geller was telling me about this thing he found in a magnanese nodule — some kind of meteorite?"

"Yes, an australite."

"What did you do with it, do you remember?"

"I labeled it and put it in a cabinet in my office."

"If I call somebody down there, could you tell them where it is and get them to bring it up?"

"Sure. Call Tim Vincent. What do you want it for?"

"I'm not sure yet."

McNulty got Vincent on the phone and handed it to her.

"Tim, in the right-hand cabinet on the wall across from my desk, on the second shelf there's a labeled australite — the one Randy found in the nodule. Could you find it and bring it up to Dr. McNulty?" She handed back the phone. "He'll be up in a few minutes."

Vincent was a narrow-faced young man with an uneasy smile. "This what you wanted?" he asked.

McNulty took the cracked sphere and turned it over in his fingers. "Guess so. Is this the way they usually look?"

"They come in all kinds of shapes. Some are like little flat buttons. Some are lumps."

McNulty sniffed at it. "Could you analyze the inside of this to see if anything was in it?"

"What would I be testing for?"

"Damn if I know. Some kind of gas, maybe?"

"Well, that's a big order. If it were a gas, there wouldn't be anything left in there, anyway."

"Volatile oil, then? See what you can do, will you? I'd really appreciate it."

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"O.K.," said Vincent without visible enthusiasm, and went away.

The next day McNulty found Geller sitting up and eating poached eggs and toast with apparent appetite. "Feeling pretty good?" he asked.

"Sure. Raring to go."

McNulty sat down and looked at his chart. In fact, Geller seemed to be making a remarkable recovery.

"We were talking before about your dizzy spell when you opened the australite. Do you think there could be some connection between that and your getting sick?"

"That's *post hoc, ergo propter hoc,*" Geller said with his mouth full.

"I'm sorry?"

Geller swallowed. " 'After this, therefore because of this.' A common logical fallacy. Before you can show a causal connection, you have to exclude sources of error. In other words, did anything else happen besides opening the australite that could have started the epidemic?"

"Such as what?"

"I don't know. It's all bullshit, anyway."

"What do you mean?" McNulty asked. There was a funny expression on Geller's face.

"Ah, hell. That's just the conventional crap I was feeding you. I don't even know why I said it. Sure, I think something else came out of that australite. I'll tell you something else: I think it's intelligent."

"But you say you didn't see anything when you cracked the thing open?"

"Right. So it's invisible, or it's a gas, or too small to be seen, or some kind of coherent packet of energy, or who knows what. One thing we can be pretty sure of: It's not from here. It fell out of space, maybe millions of years ago. So there's no reason to expect it to look like anything we're familiar with."

"I've been thinking the same thing, but I thought I was crazy. The damn thing knows what we're doing. When I asked people to come in if they felt faint, it jumped from one to another every time they started to do it. All right, suppose all this is true. What can we do about it? Give me some ideas — I'm fresh out."

Geller leaned back and wiped his lips, looking pleased. "Well, what do we know so far? First of all, we know that the collapse comes when the thing leaves. When it goes into somebody, they feel faint for a minute. Second, we know — or at least I know —that it doesn't make you feel any different while it's in you."

"What about afterward?" McNulty asked delicately. "Do you feel different now?"

Geller scowled at him. "I don't know. Maybe. There's your *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* again. If I do feel different, we still don't know if it's because I had the parasite."

"Could you tell me what the difference is?"

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"In how I feel?" Geller hesitated. "To tell you the truth, I'm just not buying a lot of the stuff I used to swallow."

"That could happen to anybody," McNulty said sympathetically.

"Sure. So let's skip it and get back to the parasite. One thing we know: It couldn't get out of that glass ball until the ball was broken. So whatever it is, it probably can't pass through a solid object. So the problem is to get the jinni back in the bottle."

McNulty had his notepad out and was doodling. "If we put somebody in a glass case?" he said tentatively.

"It's too smart for that. Unless we could get them when they're asleep."

McNulty shook his head. "Glass case," he said. "Like an aquarium? What would you do about the seams? There'd have to an air supply. Might get out through the hoses. Got to be something better."

"Well, what are its limitations? First of all, it never has gone through a wall or anything, as far as we know — is that right?"

McNulty nodded.

"O.K., that's something. Next thing, how far away have the patients been from each other?"

McNulty looked startled. "Never thought of that. They've all been close."

"What's the farthest?"

"I'd have to ask. Probably three, four feet."

"O.K., if it never has gone farther than that, it may be because it can't. Anything else?"

McNulty stared at the wall. "Sleep," he said. "You talked about sleep. I'd have to go through the interviews, but I bet I'm right — it never has left a person when they were asleep."

"Good. All right, let's see what we've got. It can't go through walls, it can't travel more than three or four feet between people, and it can't leave a sleeping person. What does that add up to?"

McNulty looked at the desk awhile. "What it adds up to," he said, "is who's going to bell the cat?"

23

Three or four people popped out of their offices to greet him as he walked down the hall. "Glad to see you back," they said, with embarrassed smiles. "You O.K. now? That's great."

"Listen, I'm *really* glad to see you back," said Tim Vincent. The cigarette in his mouth was trembling. "We've been terrifically shorthanded here since you and Yvonne got sick. If you can start doing the temp and salinity again, and all that stuff, it'll really make a difference."

"Sure," said Geller.

"Well — it's about time for the ten o'clock. Can you take over now? Is it O.K.?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"All right. Sorry. See you later."

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Vincent disappeared into his own lab.

Geller looked at the familiar instruments; it was amazing that he had never noticed how ugly they were. He picked up the log, looked over the last few entries in Vincent's crummy handwriting. Feeling an unreasonable irritation, he checked the recording salinometer and thermometer, put them back through the hatch, and started them down on the cable. It was time for the dredge, too; he noticed in the log that Vincent had skipped that a few times. Too busy dissecting his fish. He started the dredge cable, noted the time in the log, and poured himself a cup of coffee.

Water samples were lined up in a rack, about a week's worth, labeled with date, time, and depth, but the analyses had not been done. It would take him at least a week to catch up, working a couple of hours overtime every day.

He picked up the first one, took a measured sample, added reagents. PCB, twenty-one parts per million. He noted it on a fresh page in the log. What was he doing this for?

He sat down and tried to remember how he felt about his work before he got sick. It had never been any more fun than it was now, as far as he could recall, but he had done it anyway, one day after the next: why was that? Gathering data — grim little numbers in a book. He remembered something he had told Newland: "I'm not that crazy about theories. What we need are data." Balls. The data went into computers, and the computers drew charts and graphs, piling up ugly stacks of paper, and eventually somebody would analyze them and come up with some new revision of a revision of the model of deepwater distribution.

With startling clarity, he suddenly remembered the experience that had made him go into marine science in the first place. He was sixteen, a high school kid in Skokie, Illinois. It was a warm May day, and the windows were open in the biology room, the fresh air blowing in to mingle with the stinks. Some visiting scientist was there, a skinny guy with receding ginger-colored hair. Geller couldn't even remember his name. He wasn't paying much attention until the guy showed them a little bottle with a cork in it and a yellowed slip of paper inside. He handed it around for them to look at, and when it came to Geller, he read the violet writing on the paper through the bluish glass, spidery, faded, almost invisible: San Francisco, July 17, 1893. And he heard the ginger-haired man saying, "That bottle was picked up by a Japanese fisherman off Hokkaido in January 1963."

Seventy years. And right then, with the image in his head of that bottle bobbing around and around in the Pacific currents since before his parents were born, he knew what he wanted to do with his life.

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Then college, and the M.S., and the goddamn dissertation, garbage done the way his professor wanted it. He had known it would be hard work, and he had realized the importance of objectivity. You could not let your romantic feelings get in the way: you had to look at the instruments. One Sunday afternoon, about six months after he came to Sea Venture, he was on the Sports Deck looking out through the screen, and he realized suddenly that he hated the sight of the ocean. He never went up there again, and on his next vacation, he went as far inland as he could get.

He had told McNulty that he wasn't buying the stuff he used to swallow, and that was true, but it was more than that. He felt now that he had been supremely, unbelievably dumb for the past ten years.

He looked at the racks of water samples, then got up and took off his lab coat.

Vincent came out of his lab as he passed the fish tanks. "Everything O.K.?" he asked.

"Sure."

"Where you going now?"

"Out. If you see Yvonne, tell her I quit."

Vincent followed him down the hall. "Randy, are you still sick?"

"Hell, no, I'm feeling fine, but this is a dumb job and they can shove it."

"Now wait a minute." Vincent caught up with him and grabbed him by the sleeve. "Are you telling me you're going to walk out and leave me to do my work and yours. too?"

"Take your hand off me, you stupid bastard."

"What? Listen, Geller, I've taken about enough—"

Geller hit him in the mouth as hard as he could. Vincent went sprawling on the floor. When he got up, Geller hit him again; this time he stayed down.

24

There it came, down the long corridor, crickety, crickety, crickety. Emily stopped, turned her head to listen.

"What's the matter now?" said Jim.

"Don't you hear it?"

"Hear what?"

"The grocery cart." It was coming nearer, crickety, crickety.

Jim took her arm. "What are you talking about, for God's sake?"

"It's his grocery cart." A tall, sour-smelling man was coming toward them down the corridor; the sound trailed behind him, ghostly, echoing. The man turned and went down a side corridor, and the sound went with him. Emily started to follow, but Jim was holding her arm.

"Whose grocery cart?"

"Danny's. He's here, he wants to tell us something."

"Oh, Christ," said Jim. He looked as if he were about to cry.

McNulty walked into the room

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where his patient was waiting, introduced himself, shook hands, and sat down with his elbows on the desk. "You say it's about your wife, Mr. Woodruff?"

Woodruff was in his mid-sixties, red-faced and white-haired; he looked like a man who had been prosperous most of his life, but there was something wrong with the look in his eyes. McNulty had seen that look before, in the eyes of people who had gone through some shattering loss: it was a wounded look, hard to describe — the scleras a little darkened, maybe, a pinched expression in the eyelids.

"She's hearing things," Woodruff said. He was holding onto one hand with the other, hard enough to make the fingers turn red and yellow.

"What kind of things does she hear?"

Woodruff swallowed. "A grocery cart. She hears a grocery cart coming down the hall behind some guy, and then she wants to follow him."

"How many times has this happened?"

"Twice. The first time was yesterday. Then she heard it again this morning when we were on our way to breakfast, and she followed this same guy into the restaurant. Then we ordered, and halfway through breakfast, this guy fell over out of his chair."

McNulty perked up. "Where was this?"

"In the Madison Restaurant, where we always eat."

"About 9:30, was it?"

"Yeah, about that."

McNulty doodled a big check mark on his pad. "That's interesting. Then what?"

"Then she heard the noise again when somebody else got up from another table. A woman. And Emily got up, too, and followed her out. I had to talk her out of getting in the elevator. I took her back to the room and made her take a pill."

"What kind of medication is she on?"

"Valium, and some other stuff for sleeping pills, I forget what it is."

McNulty made another doodle. a spiral this time. "Has she ever had any mental disturbance before?"

"Yeah," said Woodruff, and looked down at his hands. "She had a nervous breakdown after our boy died in '73. She was in the hospital for five months."

"What kind of treatment did she get there, do you know?"

"Insulin."

"Insulin shock?"

"Yes."

"Surprised to hear that," McNulty said, and looked at his doodles. "What about afterward — did she ever hear things until now?"

"No. She's always been nervous. She's a nervous woman."

"Now," McNulty said, "what about the grocery cart? That seems like a funny thing to hear. Does it mean

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anything to you?"

Woodruff did not answer for a moment. When McNulty looked at him, tears were spilling over Woodruff's eyelids. "Yeah," he said hoarsely. "Yeah. It was Danny."

Danny was their youngest, born when Emily was thirty-five. When the boy was about two years old, Jim found an abandoned grocery cart in a weedy lot down the street. There was nothing on it to show where it belonged, so he brought it home just to keep it from being an eyesore. He thought he might give it to the handyman, or something, but when Danny saw it he claimed it for his own. It was his favorite toy. There was something wrong with the wheels; they made a cricking sound when he pushed it, around and around through the house. "At least you always know where he is," Jim had said.

That summer of 1973, Jim had bought a big new motor home, and it was all packed for their vacation. A neighbor, Walt Singleton, was standing at the end of the driveway to help Jim when he backed the motor home out of the garage. Emily had gone into the house to get some last-minute thing, and he had got tired of waiting for her. He remembered the new-leather smell of the upholstery, the brightness of the sunlight through the blue-tinted windshield. He remembered starting the engine and listening to its confident purr. Watching Walt in the rearview mirror, he put the gearshift into reverse and drifted slowly backward. Then he felt a bump, and heard Walt scream.

"Doc, that was twenty-five years ago," he said. "What the hell, can't we ever—" His voice broke.

25

Two weeks after the horror began, panic was growing in Sea Venture. Instead of going to restaurants for their meals, many people made forays on the kitchens, grabbed whatever food they could, and carried it back to their rooms. Sometimes other passengers took it away from them in the corridors. The reckless few who spent their time in public places were becoming violent and unpredictable. The casino had to shut down after a series of free-for-alls; nearly all the shops and most of the restaurants were closed. Vandalism was becoming a problem; deck chairs and equipment were hurled about on the Sports Deck; light fixtures in the ceilings were broken.

At one of the staff meetings, now being held daily, they talked about the food problem.

"Let's set up food distribution stations in the lobbies," suggested Arline Truman. "Just a line of tables — let people take what they want. Maybe it'll be more orderly if they know we think it's all right to take the food."

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"They'll hoard it," said Armand Schaffer.

"Well, perhaps, but then they won't have to come back every day."

"That means a lot of wastage. What if we do it this way — make cartons of staple food, either cans or the kind of thing that will keep in refrigerators. Try to get some kind of nutritional balance. Buffet food. Ham, cold chicken, roast beef. They can survive on that awhile. Then you don't have them grabbing for this and that. I agree that would be a mess."

"What about deliveries to people who can't get out so easily?"

"We can handle that," Skolnik said. "I'm a little more worried about sanitation. Those rooms must be getting filthy — the maids can't get in. We're trying to keep up deliveries of clean sheets and towels, and so on, but we're shorthanded even for that. What if we get another outbreak of disease here? That would really put the capper on it."

Luis Padilla wheeled his cart up to the door of 18 and knocked. "Just a minute," came a slurred voice.

The door opened and Mrs. Emerton stood there, swaying a little. "Oh, it's Luis," she said. Her eyes did not quite focus. "Luis is back, isn't that nice, David? Come in, Luis. Look, David, it's Luis."

She stumbled as she walked ahead of him. She was wearing a negligee, a blue one through which he could see the gleam of her enormous buttocks. Mr. Emerton, with a glassy smile, was sprawled on the divan with his necktie hanging. Mrs. Emerton made an elephantine turn, tipped, and sat down heavily beside him. "Put there," she mumbled. "Luis."

Padilla moved the highball glasses aside and unloaded his cart: caviar, of course; crackers; a split of champagne. Mr. Emerton's eyes were closed; he had slipped a little farther down the sofa. Mrs. Emerton mumbled something else; then her eyes closed and her mouth fell open. Mr. Emerton was snoring.

Beyond her, on the dressing table, he could see the open jewel box with necklaces scattered beside it.

"Mrs. Emerton?" he said, leaning over. She did not answer.

Padilla walked silently around the end of the divan and looked at the jewels. The emerald alone was probably worth fifty thousand dollars. In the jewel case was a star sapphire ring, almost as big. The pearls were certainly genuine. Padilla picked them up and slipped them into his pocket; then the emerald and the sapphire; then two diamond clips and a solitaire. Together they might bring seventy or eighty thousand dollars in Manila; his cousin Renaldo would know how to dispose of them. With this and his savings, Padilla could buy the home for his father's retirement now.

He tipped back to the table, re-

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placed the things he had brought on his cart, moved the highball glasses to their former positions.

Outside in the corridor he left the cart beside the door. If he said he had knocked and no one answered, they would remember nothing when they woke up. In the service elevator he began to whistle.

26

When Stevens found out that Professor Newland was convalescing in the room next to his, he was suffciently amused to drop in and introduce himself. By comparing notes, they discovered that they had been stricken within a few minutes of each other. The infection had passed from Stevens to a woman in the elevator, from her to the Steward Kim Lee, and from Kim to Newland. "It almost makes you think there's some meaningful connection, doesn't it?" Newland said.

"As if we were intended to meet?" Stevens said. "I should have preferred some other way."

Newland smiled. "Well, I would, too, but we don't always get to choose. Don't you feel, when you look back at your life, that everything important has been the result of some accident?"

"No," said Stevens. "I don't believe in accidents."

It had crossed his mind, in fact, that there might be nothing accidental about the epidemic; that it might be the work of the group that employed him; certainly, if he had identified them correctly, nothing could have been more apt to their purpose. But if they had planned such a thing, his employment would not have been necessary, and he would not be here.

He had wondered, too, whether there was any point now in the assassination he had been paid to carry out. Again assuming that he knew his employers' motives, surely Newland's death would go almost unnoticed in the general catastrophe and would serve no purpose. But he was not paid to speculate. He had received no new instructions, and did not expect any.

More to the point, he no longer knew what he wanted. He found that he rather liked Newland; under other circumstances it would have been a pleasure to cultivate his friendship. It amused him to contemplate the fact that Newland's life hung on an essentially whimsical decision that he had yet to make.

For the first time in many years, he was curious about his own motives. For the fanatics and tyrants who employed him, he had nothing but contempt. He had never killed out of passion or conviction. Professionalism aside, he killed in order to confront death by giving it.

Now he had begun to wonder if his attitudes and beliefs were merely the chemical residues of early experiences in his brain, like those of other men. Would he have been different if

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his father had not killed himself, in a dirty Paris hotel, when Stevens was thirteen? Or if his childhood lover, Maria Talliavera, had not been killed by her stepfather in the attic of the house on the rue des Jardins? Was there another Stevens who might have existed, might still exist, crying inside like an unborn twin?

The talk turned to L-5 and then to Sea Venture. "I can see all the obvious similarities," Newland said. "They're striking, and they were very effective on Capital Hill. Sea Venture is the prototype of a self-sufficient habitat in a partly explored element; it has some of the same technical problems — integrity of the hull, life support, communications, air locks, and so on. Even some of the solutions are the same."

"Then do you think it makes sense to go into the oceans instead of into outer space?" Stevens asked politely.

"If we can't do both?" Newland said. "I honestly don't know. I suppose it depends on what you want. One of the great attractions of L-5 was always that it meant going into an absolutely alien medium, a place where humankind had never been. Extending our range, not by just a few million square miles, but almost indefinitely. That has a very powerful appeal. But I'm not sure anymore why we do what we do."

"Or whether it is a good thing for human beings to exist?"

Newland glanced at him curiously. "That's something I hadn't given much thought to. I suppose we take it as a given."

"But not for any logical reason?"

"No, not a logical reason. Do you hate the human race, John?"

"Oh, no. Schopenhauer said that to hate every miserable creature one meets would take all one's time, whereas one can despise them with perfect ease."

"I see." Newland stroked his chin. "and that's your philosophy?"

"Like you, I'm not sure anymore what my philosophy is. At one time I thought it was enough to be aware of the absurdity of the human animal, to eat well, sleep well, and have a healthy conscience."

"And how do you manage that?"

"I don't, anymore. A healthy conscience, I must tell you, is like a healthy liver — when it is healthy, it doesn't bother you. But that was when I was thirty-nine."

"How old are you now?"

"Three days ago I was forty."

"A great age," said Newland gravely.

Steven grinned. "Touché. And you, Paul, how old are you?"

"I'm sixty-three. For what it's worth, I've been through four of these age things. The first one was when I was a little over thirty. I thought, here I am, thirty-one or thirty-two, my life is half over, and what have I done?"

"Yes."

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"And then again in my forties, and fifties. And the sixties. It's the numbers; they're like the numbers on an odometer: every time the big one changes, it calls your attention to the time that's gone."

Stevens was watching him intently. "Do you ever think it would be better just to have done with it?"

"Oh." Newland looked at his hands. "No, not seriously. There's always been something more to do, and I've always known that when you get out of one of these troughs, things look bright again."

"Darkest before the dawn," said Stevens, not quite keeping the irony out of his voice.

Newland folded his hands. "All I can tell you," he said, "is that I still have a strong sense of some meaning in life, even if I can't say what it is. We all have to decide for ourselves whether that's enough. Give yourself a chance."

27

His first meeting with Julie and her parents after their recovery was a subdued occasion. They had lunch in the Prescott's suite — ham sandwiches and tea. Prescott went out for supplies every other day; except for that, they did not venture out of their room, and Mrs. Prescott, although she tried to seem gay, was obviously in a state bordering on hysteria.

When Stevens suggested a walk on the Promenade Deck with Julie, Mrs. Prescott was horrified. "You mustn't go out there!" she said. "I forbid it, Julie."

"Mother, I've had the disease already," she said wearily.

"That doesn't matter! There are people roaming around, doing terrible things. Lionel, tell her she mustn't!"

Prescott looked embarrassed. "Julie, I really think it might be better—"

"I have something to talk over with John," she said. "We won't be long."

"I'll bring her back safely, Mrs. Prescott."

The Promenade Deck was almost deserted. Scraps of paper littered the carpet; the trash cans and ash receivers were overflowing. Outside, the sky was brilliant over a glittering sea.

"Let's sit down here," said Julie. Her face looked drawn. "Do you want to see me again?" she asked after a moment.

"How can you ask?" Stevens bent toward her, put a hand on her arm.

"Please." She moved away slightly. "I just want the answer. If it's yes, that's all right; and if it's no, that's all right, too."

Stevens studied her curiously. There was a change in her; she was less vulnerable and somehow more interesting. He had not stopped to consider whether he really wanted her; now he discovered that he did.

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"Yes," he said quietly. "Let's go to my room."

Afterward she said, "It isn't the same, is it?"

"No."

"I don't love you, you know. It's better with love."

"And when did you realize that?"

"After I was sick. I didn't love you before, but I thought I did. What were you after, my parents' money? They haven't got much."

Stevens got a cigarette out of his pack and lit it. "Julie, I'm not a fortune hunter."

"You're not a member of Gallard Frères in New York, either. I called a friend of Dad's."

"Did you say Gallard? It's Ballard, dear, with a *B*."

"Don't lie," she said. "What's the point of lying?"

And indeed, he could see that it was only a habit, a part of the game he had been playing so long that he had forgotteen there was any other way to live.

"You know," he said, "I really wish I could tell you all the truth about myself."

She looked at him. "Do you know it all?"

"Does anyone?" He turned and put his hand on her shoulder. "Do you want us to go on meeting?"

She smiled faintly. "Yes. Why not?"

After his wife got well, Malcolm Claiborne insisted on their leading as normal a life as possible; he could not bear the thought, he said, of keeping her cooped up in a stateroom after what she had already been through. "It's foolish to take the chance," she said. "I've had the disease, but you haven't."

"That doesn't matter," said Malcolm.

He had been frantic with worry, especially after she was found in another man's stateroom. When she explained why she had done it, he wept warm tears on her cheek. Never, he said, had any man had such a companion.

They ate in the restaurants that were still open, walked on the Promenade Deck, lounged beside the open-air pool. He was tender and solicitous, because, he said, she still hadn't got her strength back; but that was not the reason.

One day at lunch, Norman Yeager came up to their table, smiling, diffident, in his worn blue jeans and his funny little hat. When she introduced them, she could tell that Malcolm, in an excess of magnaminity, was about to invite him to sit down. She warned him under the table, and after a few moments of shifting from foot to foot, Yeager went away.

"He seems perfectly harmless," Malcolm said afterward. "We could have been a little more cordial, don't you think? After all, he did you a tremendous favor. And he's probably smitten with you — why not?"

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"All the more reason," she said. "Honestly, Malcolm, did you ever really think—?"

He smiled and took her hand across the table. "Only because I was out of my mind," he said.

They had met at a party in the Village. After a few words, Malcolm had gone away and come back with a bunch of grapes, which he handed to her. "I wish they were emeralds," he said.

She smiled. "That's Charles MacArthur's line."

"I know, but I mean it as much as he did. More."

Then it had all been so quick, so natural and easy. Malcolm was a lawyer, not a Perry Mason type but a sweet, gentle man. Others had told her how lovely she was, but he was the first who made her believe it. She had loved him with a pure devotion, loved him more than her life. She remembered, as if it had happened to someone else, how she had left him the moment she knew she was infected. That was reasonable, because she believed she was going to die anyway, but she had not done it because it was reasonable. If she had been able to choose between her death and his, she would have chosen unhesitatingly. That was what seemed so extraordinary to her. She still loved him, because he was dear and familiar, and loved her, but would she give up her life for his? Probably not.

That was what she had to conceal from him, the change in her, and it was more and more difficult because he knew something was wrong and would not ask.

28

On days when he had business in the passenger section, Higpen usually managed to drop in on Newland for an hour or so. Once or twice they had lunch or dinner together. Hal Winter was always present on these occasions, and sometimes a young couple, Julie Prescott and John Stevens, who had been in the hospital at the same time as Newland.

At first Higpen made allowances for their recent illness, but as time went by, he grew more and more uneasy. There was something odd about all three of them; he was sure that Winter scented it, too.

He told himself that part of the problem was that he simply did not care for John Stevens: he was too perfectly polite, too charming, and at the same time too ironic — the sort of young man Higpen instinctively mistrusted. He felt more sympathetic toward Julie Prescott, who seemed to be making an effort to be more cheerful than she felt. But it was the change in Newland himself that disturbed him most. Newland was as gracious as ever, his conversation as fascinating, but Higpen had the eerie impression many times that Newland was playing a role. Furthermore, among

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the three of them there seemed to be some unspoken understanding, some secret agreement that excluded both him and Hal Winter.

Once, when they were alone together for a moment, he said, "Paul, how are you feeling?"

"Very well. I'm all right."

"No aftereffects?"

"No. Not physical ones, at any rate. A philosophical fallout, maybe."

"How do you mean?"

"It's hard to explain. The other day I woke up thinking about an exchange I had with a young woman in the audience at one of my lectures. That was, oh, four or five years ago, in San Diego. I don't know why I suddenly remembered it. She stood up and asked my why I thought it was important to build cities in space, or for that matter in the ocean. We already had cities on land, she said; why not spend the money to make them better?"

He smiled at Higpen. "Well, I put her down with two or three well-chosen phrases. I said that we hadn't got where we are by settling for what we had. We've always been an exploring animal; we've gone everywhere it was possible for us to go, and done everything it was possible for us to do. That's what made us great, I said."

"Good."

"Yes, and she sat down, but the other morning I seemed to hear her voice saying, 'Why do we have to be great?' And I couldn't think of the answer."

"Well," said Higpen uncomfortably.

"You see, you can't think of it either."

Hal Winter came back into the room and sat down. "Hal, maybe you can tell us — why do we have to be great?"

Hal looked wary. "Great in what way?"

"You know, building pyramids, climbing Everest, going into space."

Hal crossed his legs. "Lots of people don't."

"No, that's true, but think where we were a hundred thousand years ago and where we are now." He turned to Higpen. "Do you remember the Tasaday?"

"In the Philippines.? Yes."

"A little tribe — what was it, about twenty people? — absolutely isolated in the jungle. They were still living in the Stone Age. They didn't know there were any other people in the world."

"I remember."

"And you know what? They were happy."

"They didn't know any better."

"No. They didn't. Something else I remember — it's funny how these things come back. An anthropologist once figured out that the Australian aborigines, before the white people came, had to work about ten hours a week, hunting and gathering. The rest of the time they could sit around and tell stories."

"So? They were naked savages."

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"Yes, that's right. And they were *happy.* I used to know a man who had lived with the Eskimos in Alaska, and he said that in the villages where they hadn't had much contact with the white people yet, they were the happiest people he had ever known."

"Paul, I'm not sure what you're getting at."

"I don't know myself, but I just began to wonder, the other morning, what's wrong with being happy?"

29

On the eighteenth day the number of patients in the hospital annex was still rising, but more slowly, and McNulty calculated that if admissions and discharges kept up at this rate, the number would level off at about thirty. He was thankful for the recoveries, but he knew no more about the illness now than he had known to begin with.

There was something else: he was increasingly disturbed by the signs of personality changes he saw in the recovered patients. Geller was the first example. Anybody listening to him talk would say he was alert, intelligent, perfectly rational, and yet he had walked out of his job without any explanation and had taken a poke at a co-worker who asked him for one. That could have been just nervous fatigue, but the next day Yvonne Barlow walked off the job, too, and McNulty gathered that the marine lab was in disarray. After them on the list came two stewards. One of them, Manuel Obregón, had been in some kind of trouble with his supervisor; there were charges and countercharges before the union committee. The other one, Luis Padilla, had been accused of stealing by a passenger.

After Padilla there was a little string of people with exotic names, Boon Hee Koh, Jamal A. Marashi, Setsuko Nakamura, and they were sprinkled in after that, more than you would expect — as if the thing were attracted to people of unusual dress or appearance. Marashi had struck his wife during a quarrel, and McNulty had to put five stitches in her lip. A Mrs. Morton Tring had left her husband of twenty years and moved in with a woman friend on the Quarter Deck. Another one had left her husband without explanation and had been found the next morning in Norman Yeager's room. There were fistfights involving recovered patients almost every day, and larger disturbances now and then. Four men, drunk and belligerent in the Quarterdeck Bar late at night, had been asked to leave by the manager; they had knocked him down, broken a bottle over his head, turned over tables, and had had to be subdued by half a dozen security people. A waiter in the Madison Restaurant, asked for the second time when a customer's french toast would be ready, had said, "Get it yourself if you're in a hurry," thrown

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a tray at the customer, walked out, and had not returned.

Geller had gone back to the marine lab once since he had left, but was not there now; he did not answer his room phone or his personal phone, and it was the same with Barlow. McNulty had had them paged repeatedly; it was late afternoon before he got a call.

"This is Geller. What the fuck do you want?"

"Just want to talk to you. Do you know where Ms. Barlow is?"

"She's here. What do you want to talk about?"

"The australite, for one thing. Vincent says he doesn't know where it is — thinks you have it."

"Vincent's an idiot. Yeah, I did a little work on it with Yvonne. It isn't glass."

"No?"

"No, it's silica in microscopic cells, kind of like a blastula."

"Organic?"

"Sure, organic."

"Well, hell, then that means— Will you bring it up and let me look at it?"

"Maybe."

"I'd like to get your ideas about this thing — yours and Ms. Barlow's."

"I'll see if she wants to." Geller hung up.

Geller and Barlow wandered in about five o'clock. Both of them looked cool, relaxed, and calm; there was something about the way they sat together that made McNulty think their relationship had turned personal.

"Here's the dingus," Geller said, handing over the cracked transparent sphere. "It's not an australite. Yvonne thinks it's an artifact."

"Even though it's organic?"

"It's the shape," Barlow said. "The inside of it is a perfect sphere within the limits of measurement." She handed him a record crystal; McNulty put it into the player and watched in fascination while an iridescent surface bloomed on the screen — a vast globe in which the lenticular cells could be made out, like some alien geodesic sphere.

"So what is it, a container, a — a kind of transportation device?"

"Looks like it. We break the capsule, something comes out, Randy gets sick."

"What kind of something?" McNulty asked.

"We've talked about that. Neither one of us believes in a microscopic intelligence, or an intelligent gas. Maybe it's an energy system, and that's why we can't see it. Randy thinks we ought to hunt for it with an electroscope." She grinned.

"Joke," said Geller, but he smiled, too.

"Listen, something else is bothering me," said McNulty, and he told them about Emily Woodruff, the woman who thought she heard the sound of the creaking grocery cart.

He had gone to talk to Mrs. Wood-

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ruff, and had found her reasonably well oriented; she knew the date, and who was president, and so on. She was a little loony, maybe, but no more so than a lot of his patients who were walking around, and he could not see any point in confining her; he certainly was not qualified or equipped to do any psychiatric stuff.

"Here's what I can't get out of my head," he told them. "According to her husband, Emily Woodruff encountered a man who seemed to be making this grocery-cart noise; she followed him into a restaurant, and then the man collapsed — that was Brian Eisenstein, one of my patients. Then Emily heard the noise again when a woman sitting nearby got up and left. And that was Mrs. Rebecca Kramer, who collapsed later that afternoon. So there you have it twice: Either she can identify a person who's about to come down with the disease, or else it's coincidence."

"There's a saying in the army — 'Once is an accident, twice is coincidence, three times is enemy action.' I don't even think you ought to call it a disease. Call it a parasite."

"Maybe Mrs. Woodruff is your electroscope," said Barlow. "She's getting some kind of information the rest of us aren't, and interpreting it her own way."

"What would you do if you were me?"

They looked at each other. "You first," said Geller.

"O.K.," Barlow said. "The trouble is, this thing is too smart for you. If you try to grab somebody who's carrying it, it jumps to somebody else. Now suppose you could identify the host, not just when the parasite enters it but anytime."

"And then what?"

"Hit him over the head with a hammer," said Geller, "cart him off to solitary. Then you've got the parasite confined to one host, and the epidemic stops."

"He's joking," said Barlow. "Not a hammer, but what about sticking him with a hypodermic? Is there something that would knock him out fast enough without killing him?"

"Sure, a couple of things, but you realize what you're asking me to do?"

"Do what you want," said Geller. He belched and started to get up.

"No, wait a minute, Randy," said Barlow. "Don't be so goddamned impatient. Look, Doctor, do you want to solve your problem or not? Find the host, stick him with a hypo. Then he's unconscious and the parasite can't get out. Take him into a stateroom and leave him there, locked up, with plenty of food. When he comes to, the parasite still can't get out, because there's nobody close enough. Then you can explain over the phone."

"Would you buy that explanation, Yvonne?" Geller asked.

"I'd be madder than hell, but you can't make an omelet without breaking eggs."

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"Sounds familiar. Isn't that what Himmler used to say?"

"Come on, Randy. Have you got a better idea?"

"No. How about you, Doctor?"

When they had gone, McNulty thought about them a long time. They were both bright, cheerful young people, smart as whips both of them, but there was something wrong with their heads. They just didn't seem to give much of a damn. Trapping the parasite was like a game to them, and they really didn't care whether it worked or not. They hadn't even bothered to tell him their discoveries about the australite until he tracked them down. Sociopaths, he thought, but that wasn't true either. There was just something missing, something important, and they didn't even know it was gone.

But they were right: he couldn't think of any other answer.

30

Bliss, after waffling for two days, finally gave his permission on Tuesday. On Wednesday morning, when the first patient came in, McNulty found out where she had been stricken — it was a coffee shop on E Deck. As soon as the patient was in bed and the tube down her nose, he called the Woodruffs and asked them to meet him in the forward lobby in E. He put on a jacket in place of his white coat, got the hypo out of the refrigerator, and slipped it into his pocket. He felt like an ax murderer.

"Let's go, Lori," he said to the security woman who was waiting in the outer office with a wheelchair. "Remember, you stay behind us, and don't come up till I call you."

Emily and Jim Woodruff were sitting on a banquette in the lobby. Jim got up when he saw McNulty approaching. "I had a hard time keeping her here. She wants to go looking, she thinks it's somewhere close."

"Good," said McNulty. "Emily, are you all set?"

"Yes."

"O.K., let's just stroll around. If you hear that noise, you tell me right away."

"I'm sure he's here," she said. "Jim wouldn't let me look before."

"That's right, because we had to get everything ready."

A few people were in the lobby, looking hostile and suspicious. They glanced into the coffee shop, which was empty except for the waitress and counterman. Lori Applewhite, the security woman, was following them a few paces behind. As they reached the far side of the lobby, a man came out of the rest room. Emily's face took on a rapt expression. "There he is," she whispered.

"Him, right there?"

McNulty signaled to Applewhite, who nodded and wheeled her chair past them. The man, gray-haired and slender, was walking rapidly away.

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"Sir," she called.

The man turned. "Yes?"

"Security. Will you show me your ID, please?"

McNulty and the Woodruffs were walking past. "Keep on going," McNulty muttered.

The man reached into his pocket. "What's this about?"

McNulty turned, got the hypo, slipped off the cap, stuck the needle into the back of the man's neck, and pressed the plunger down. He yanked the hypo out again barely in time to catch the body as it fell.

Janice was waiting for them in the room at the end of the isolation corridor. They laid the man out on the bed, loosened his necktie. McNulty took the opportunity to glance into his wallet: the man's name was Roger Cooke, and he had a driver's license from Maine. McNulty glanced up at the TV camera mounted at the corner of the ceiling. "Is that thing working?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"O.K., let's get out of here."

"I must say it seems to have worked," Bliss said. "How is he taking it?"

"He doesn't like it, but he's pretty calm. He says he's going to sue us. We're giving him priority on room service; he can get anything he wants."

"Well, that's a relief. My hat is off to you, Doctor. Have you had any thoughts about what to do with him when we get to Guam?"

"I've talked to the health commissioner there. We're trying to work something out — a Coast Guard ship anchored offshore, maybe. It would be better to get him to Manila. There's a lot of red tape, but I think we can put it all together. What the hell they'll do with him, I don't know, but at least it'll be out of our hands."

"Thank God."

After three days Sea Venture was almost back to normal; the restaurants were full, the corridors crowded and cheerful. On the fourth day, early in the morning, McNulty got a call from the security guard who was watching Cooke's room on television. Cooke appeared to be in convulsions.

With a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, McNulty went there with a nurse and opened the door. The nurse was the first one to reach the patient. McNulty knelt beside her, got the man's jaw open to make sure he wasn't biting his tongue. When he looked up, the nurse was on her feet, swaying a little. She took two steps toward the door, then fell like a tree. Before he could call out, McNulty heard another body fall in the corridor.

Cooke was dead; there was a line of victims in the hall. The horror had escaped.

(to be continued next month)

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F&SF Competition

REPORT ON COMPETITION 36

In the August issue, we asked you to send in up to a dozen proverbs or cliches, given a SF/futuristic twist. A good response, but we're always happier to see 500 entries, rather than 100. So send in your entries!
The winners:

FIRST PRIZE

You know what they say about cloning — you *can* twin 'em all!

On Jupiter, the only thing we have to fear is atmosphere itself.

Stun-walls do not a prison make, nor ion-bars a cage.

Global thermonuclear war means never having to say you're sorry.

Don't cut off your nosecone to spite your faceplate.

Will you beam my Valentine?

Men seldom make passes/At nebular gasses.

See ya later, astrogator!

—Jean MacKay Jackson
Broken Arrow, OK

SECOND PRIZE

C'est la Venus.

A picture's worth 32,000 bits.

Actions speak louder than voids.

Love it or beam up.

Easy comet, easy glow.

I love rocket roll.

Take this job and run it.

—Jack Doherty
Beavercreek, OH

RUNNERS UP

I'm OK, It's OK.

Don't trust anyone over 300.

Good force fields make good neighbors.

Ask not what the Empire can do for you, but what you can do for the Empire.

To be or never to have been — that is the question.

—John V. R. Williams
Gaithersburg, MD

Loose lips depressurize ships.

The hydroponics are always greener on the other side of the station.

Don't judge a bookfilm by its cannister.

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Those who alter the past are condemned to repeat it.

Look before you launch.

—*Carl Stetger*
Beaverton, OR

Your module or mine?

Some of my best friends are androids.

Never say discorporate.

The Doppelganger knows.

—*Dorothy C. Brown*
San Francisco, CA

The bigger they are, the larger their planet.

Where there's smoke there's fallout.

If God had meant for man to have wings, He'd have made him a fly. (genetic engineering)

Waiting for your hip to come in. (artificial transplants)

—*Bill Richardson*
Delbarton, WV

The few, the proud, the Starship Troopers.

Don't shoot the Player Piano.

Lovecraft makes the Cthulhu Mythos Go Round.

Time heals all paradoxes.

—*Augustine Funnell*
Fredericton, Can.

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Twice 22 (essays on reincarnation)

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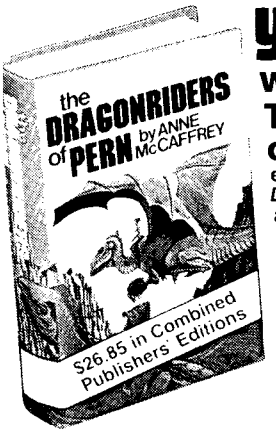

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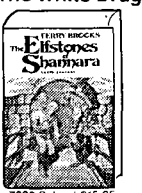

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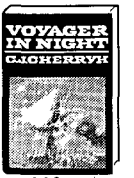

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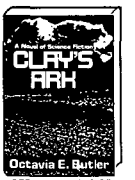

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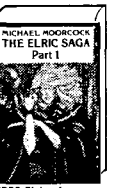

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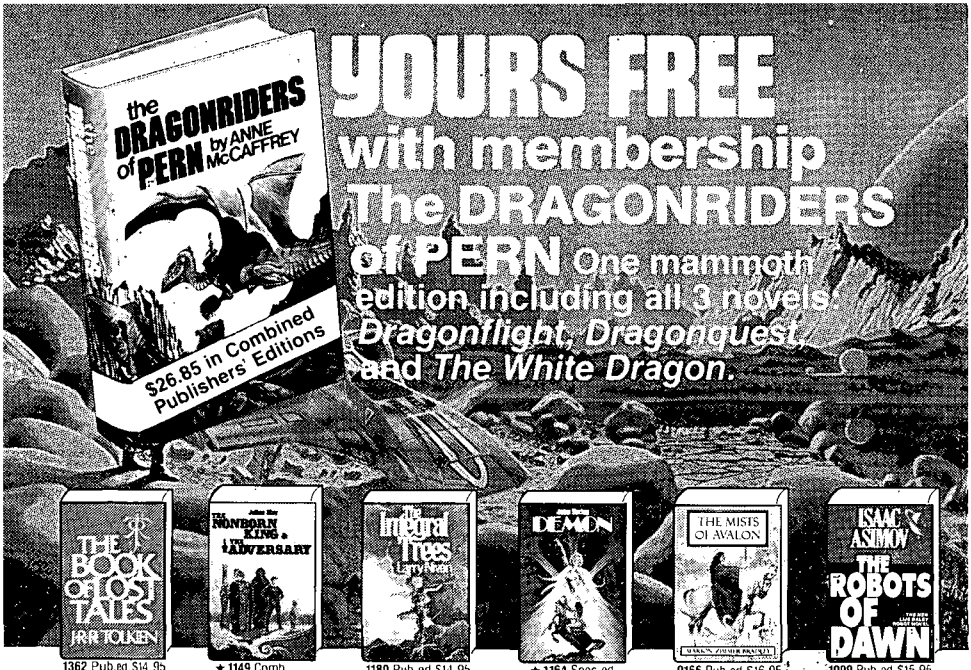

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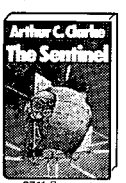

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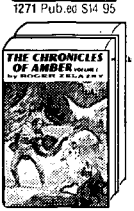

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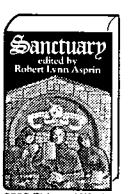

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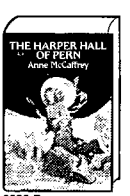

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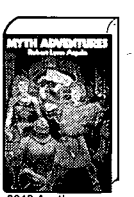

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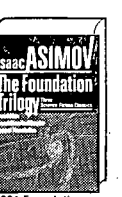

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